

MEANING IN THE NARRATIVE OF CHARLES DICKENS

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## ABSTRACT

Even within Dickens's own lifetime, the response of his readers moved from the enthusiastic reception of all things Pickwickian, to complaints that the looseness of the Pickwick format impaired any possible pleasure in it, for the discontinuity and repetition of such narrative seemed to exclude any meaningful sort of progression. Dickens was no philosopher, but the question of how meaning is evoked by his narrative has been generally overlooked. "The rhetoric of fiction" is by now a commonplace phrase but it is still valuable for reminding us of the fact that all works of the imagination seek in some way to "persuade." The presence of fantasy, however minimally, will always imply that life could be arranged differently, and that a deductive or syllogistic reasoning may not be the only rationale of human existence.

In my research I have related an examination of Dickens's memoranda notebook and journalism to his novels, in an attempt to understand how he has organized various narrative strategies --particularly, the use of sheer length and an almost anti-narrative multiplication of story and allusion--to convey his intentions. The notebook and journalism may share many topical sources with the fiction, but while turning up many noteworthy similarities, comparisons more often make apparent the possible choices of treatment available to an author, and how differences in presentation will produce significant contrasts in the expectations aroused and the resolutions achieved in discussion of the same idea. The experience of picking out various memoranda which one recognizes as eventually, and possibly surprisingly, coming together in one novel, make the critic sense that it is not just unique



entities or pellets of belief which go to make up a novel's "meaning": it is present in the very decision to speak through story and in the nature of the narrative approach. Dickens perhaps demonstrates more radically than any of his contemporaries that a twenty-part novel is, in fact, infinitely divisible in a variety of ways: why did he not repeat the successful early patterns? How did the sequentiality of Pickwick Papers gradually lead into the balance of Bleak House?

As well, it should be noted that Dickens undertook the establishment of a journal on five occasions during his career as a novelist. The origins of Pickwick Papers, Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist, and The Old Curiosity Shop show Dickens's early oscillations between journalism and fiction-writing. The thesis considers why this work seemed permanently attractive to him, and noting also that these ventures repeatedly ended in the writing of novelistic prose--how Dickens's novels can be seen in some sense to be his more successful forms of "miscellany."

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## INTRODUCTION

Within Dickens's own lifetime, the response of his readers moved, from the profoundly enthusiastic reception of all things Pickwickian, to increasingly formalistic complaints that the looseness of the Pickwick format impaired any possible pleasure in it. A twenty-part novel, although very far from being of infinite length, may still offer enough room for an almost infinite number of diversions to be inserted, and the discontinuity and repetition of a narrative in the Pickwickian sense seemed to exclude any meaningful sort of progression. Sam Weller's anecdotes, appearing in the midst of even urgently progressive scenes of incident, are anti-conclusive in nature, keeping the dramatic action thoroughly in the present tense. There

is no reason to think that Dickens, however much he personally enjoyed Tristram Shandy or the Arabian Nights, necessarily wanted to produce his novels in the same pattern; but that his first work, from Sketches by Boz to Martin Chuzzlewit, partook of an episodic tendency is self-evident. The loose picaresque succession of incident and tale, which comprised his first attempts in the twenty-part format, then gave way to the bulky late novels, which are usually seen to evince a firmer, more mature control of the main narrative. Paradoxically, at the same time, these novels can also be seen to invoke an even greater quantity of observed detail and histories, such that, latterly, the number of stories embedded within a narrative of twenty parts can begin to seem almost truly infinite.

The considerations behind the disposition of this form were recognized by G.K. Chesterton, who personally lived through some of the change in critical tastes. In an undated essay, "Disputes on Dickens," he wrote:

You cannot exhibit Sam Weller in a flash of lightning. The whole emotional significance of Sam Weller depends upon the idea that like some warrior of the mythic ages, he has passed unscathed through innumerable adventures....The formlessness of 'Pickwick' is therefore its form. ...[I]f the central symbol of the whole story were Mr. Sawyer's red handkerchief or Mr. Winkle's horse; if the Pickwick Papers in short were only a brilliant fragment of psychology about the fat boy, or a sad sea-green little idyll

about Mr. Stiggins, it would not be a better book but a worse, for it would have lost its supreme meaning even as we have lost its sense of a world almost choked with adventure and a hero constant only in the mutability of a comic Ulysses, faithful only to his own omnivorous fickleness.<sup>1</sup>

The habitual lengthiness of Dickens's novels is, for Chesterton, a positive fictional value, and in another essay, this time on the Arabian Nights, the intrinsic need for length becomes identified with a fundamental appetite for life, and "The wish for an everlasting story one with the wish for an everlasting earthly existence."<sup>2</sup> According to Chesterton, there is a basic greediness for the imaginative as well as physical life, a fantasizing appetite which cannot bear ever to have an imaginative adventure end absolutely.

This is perhaps also the attitude implied behind an observation made by Northrop Frye, that Dickens's typical "sprawling octopus of a plot involving disguise, conspiracy, mystery, suspense, and violence, which we can hardly follow at the time and cannot remember afterwards, seems to be almost an anti-narrative."<sup>3</sup> Like Chesterton, Frye seems to suggest that there is

<sup>1</sup>G.K. Chesterton, "Disputes on Dickens," The Spice of Life, ed. Dorothy Collins (Beaconsfield: Darwen Finlayson, 1964), pp. 83-84.

<sup>2</sup>Chesterton, "The Everlasting Nights," The Spice of Life, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 40.

an impulse behind Dickens's manner of composition, revealing precisely this reader's "appetite," by its anti-progressive tendency to prolong the fictional experience. With deference to the undoubted achievement of all the studies of Dickens demonstrating the taut integrity of his plot constructions and imagery, surely Frye's description here is more truly evocative of our reading experience of Dickens. The need is for an aesthetic account of his art, which corresponds to this experience: one which acknowledges the pleasure in improvisation and attempts to come to terms with the type of "meaning" intrinsic to this form of narrative. One does not inquire what the meaning of his novels is, but rather, by what arrangements of character and incident his writing invokes the reader's feeling that they are meaningful.

The "rhetoric of fiction" is by now a commonplace phrase but it is still valuable for reminding us of the fact that all works of the imagination seek in some way to "persuade." The presence of fantasy, however minimally, will always imply that life could be arranged differently, and that a deductive or syllogistic reasoning may not be the only rationale of human existence. Thus fiction and its characteristic rhetoric can be used to communicate a definite cluster of values which the reader may be induced to accept, through the gratifications supplied by the story in which they appear. Hence, we speak of the importance of narrative strategy or organization.

In considering the possible relations between fiction and forms of meaning, this study will look at: the information offered by Pickwick Papers and the circumstances surrounding Dickens's transition from journalism into novel-writing; the significance of Dickens's consistent attempts, even as he wrote his novels, to establish his own magazine; the statements about his art found in the prefaces to his novels; the effect of two contrasting narrative rhetorics in the construction of Bleak House; and a comparison between the satirical writing in his journalism and that found in a topical novel like Little Dorrit.

The importance of all these types of writing will lie in their relevance to questions of narrative organization and how it evokes Meaning. But, further than that, the study of meaning may go beyond the differences between the rhetoric of novels and other forms of writing. The problem is not just that a novel may make its connections to the real world in a way different from that of documentary writing. In a much more fundamental way, all writing intrinsically relies upon a narrative "logic" or reasoning in its ordering of the world, and one must inquire about the philosophical assumptions to be examined in the very tendency to tell stories.

Is the rhetoric of fiction capable not only of relaying denominated values, but also, of insinuating a whole realm of value, which happens itself to be integral to the act of telling a story? Does a



habitual composer of narrative--on whatever scale--have a typical way of sizing up the world, which is dictated by the fact that he always arranges it narratively?

This question will lie behind all the chapters, but particularly the last, which has for its subject the memorandum notebook begun by Dickens in order to record passing ideas for stories. There we view his imagination apparently in isolation from authorial techniques, and may discover the type of stories or narrative patterns which were intrinsically compelling to Dickens--and hence, perhaps, the way in which the sense of a meaning characteristically suggested itself to his mind. From this, we as readers, may also come to understand more about the narrative structures by which the imagination of Dickens compels our own attraction to its world.



CHAPTER I  
IN THE PICKWICKIAN SENSE

The conventionally ephemeral format of The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club instituted Dickens's career as a novelist; yet, more than with Dickens's other works, to apprehend the form of Pickwick, and therefore also, the nature of its organization and unity, seems a difficult and intriguing task for commentators. In praise of it, G.K. Chesterton declared that it is not a novel at all,<sup>1</sup> and W.H. Auden, that it is a Christian fable.<sup>2</sup> A contemporary review described it at the time of its second number, as "an entertaining, miscellaneous collection of tales, anecdotes, etc., collected and arranged by Boz."<sup>3</sup> The preliminary advertisement in the Athenaeum of 26 March 1836 certainly projects no image of "Boz" as a novelist in the

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<sup>1</sup>G.K. Chesterton, "The Pickwick Papers," Charles Dickens (London: Methuen, 1906), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>W.H. Auden, "Dingley Dell and the Fleet," The Dyer's Hand and other essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 407-28.

<sup>3</sup>The Sun, 2 May 1836; quoted in John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 68n.

grand three-volume style but, rather, as a hired editor: "a gentleman whom the publishers consider highly qualified for the task of arranging these important documents, and placing them before the public in an attractive form."<sup>4</sup>

Just as with Dickens's initial contribution, a year later, to the first magazine which he edited, Bentley's Miscellany, so Pickwick too opens with what appears to be a satire on the British Association for the Advancement of Science, a favourite target among contemporary humorists and an institution more prominent for its verbal fatuousness than its progressiveness. The return to this format again, in Bentley's, seems to show its particular usefulness for periodical literature. He had also done something of this sort in a couple of the Sketches ("The House," 11 April 1835; and "Our Parish," 14 July 1835), satirizing the House of Commons and the Parish vestry. Pickwick's chief difference from these lay in the way Dickens placed such speechifying firmly within a narrative development, remarking on this framework in the writing of Pickwick itself at the end of the first chapter, for example, where there is an editorial interjection:

We have no official statement of the facts, which the reader will find recorded in the next chapter,

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<sup>4</sup>Charles Dickens, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, ed. Robert L. Patten (1837; Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books, 1972; rpt. 1976), Appendix A., p. 900.

but they have been carefully collated from letters and other MS. authorities, so unquestionably genuine, as to justify their narration in a connected form.<sup>5</sup>

And, looking over the first pages of the next chapter, the reader is drawn confidently into the dialogue of Pickwick and the Cockney cabman who cheekily sizes up the venerable clubman as "Only a bob's vorth" (PP, 5). The second chapter resembles the first tales set in lower-class London which Dickens had published in the Monthly Magazine. Up to about the end of the fifth number Dickens is repeating the gambits most associated with "Boz," except that, instead of the average weekly or fortnightly intervals between the Sketches, here the length of two or three sketches is run together monthly. The Sketches had required no formal transitions between them; the chapters of Pickwick, until the author as well as the character of Pickwick grew equal to the stretch of a sustained narrative, showed the effort of much blatant ingenuity to connect.

To gloss over these awkwardnesses, in critical arguments, also requires some ingenuity, and tends to obfuscation about the fundamental nature of Dickens's artistic development. More effectively, a study such as Dickens at Work is useful as an attempt to find an historical solution to the problem about the exact

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<sup>5</sup>Charles Dickens, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (London: Chapman and Hall, 1837), p. 4. All subsequent page references to this work will be incorporated in my text, preceded by "PP" and enclosed in parentheses.

nature of Pickwick's narrative, by exploring the place of this book in Dickens's early career and commitments, and in the light of these practical considerations, what image it took in the mind of Dickens himself. This chapter will also seek largely to apply such a perspective in formulating its critical argument. Examination of some of the features of the text of Pickwick itself may further illuminate the nature of its narrative and organization.

## i

Modern readers perhaps tend to read Pickwick in the light of later works or even in the general tradition of the Novel, regardless of striking differences--for its form has been justified in retrospect. There is little doubt of Dickens's ambition to become famous as a novelist, though this did not exclude other types of fame as well, but it is by no means certain that his writing in Pickwick therefore coincided with his notions at the time of what a novel was or should be. As well as studying the circumstances surrounding the composition of Pickwick, the attempt must be made to determine which of his early works Dickens did view as his first novel while he was working on it.

Of course, the process of making Pickwick more consistent in form with his later work began with Dickens himself. As John Butt describes the sequence of events, Chapman and Hall's proposal that Dickens should supply a

lively text to accompany Seymour's sporting-club plates, came at a tangent to his own plans to establish his career. The obvious path was both to exploit his skills as a sketch writer and perhaps develop those of a respectable three-volume novelist, while continuing in the security of being a reporter. Therefore it seems likely that, but for the remuneration, Dickens would have been disinclined to add this rather hack-work job to his busy schedule: "My friends told me it was a low cheap form of publication, by which I should ruin all my rising hopes." To this, Dickens adds the footnote pointing out, "This book would have cost, at the then established price of novels, about four guineas and a half."<sup>6</sup> By this, he undoubtedly meant to draw attention to the book's low cost in the edition of 1847. But such a remark also points out that the established price of novels belonged to a certain length or quantity of letterpress, as well as a certain type of physical presentation; the length of Pickwick had corresponded originally to a notion of time, not material. The fact that Chapman and Hall did not set its price at four-and-a-half guineas perhaps indicates more than Dickens intended by his note: it suggests that there was no clear notion that Pickwick was or would become a novel. They did not know how long it would run or with what size of a book they would finish.

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<sup>6</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface to the First Cheap Edition," The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (London: Chapman and Hall, 1847), p. ix.

The advertisement in the Athenaeum of 26 March 1836 estimated around twenty numbers, but the letter from Chapman and Hall a month before, which confirmed the original arrangements, stated nothing about the final number of instalments and its specifications for the amount of monthly copy required were optimistic and flexible: "Should the publication prove very successful we shall of course be happy to increase the amount in a proportionate degree."<sup>7</sup> Only afterwards could the disproportionate dimensions of its success be measured.

Pickwick is usually compared to Surtees' Jorrocks series or John Poole's "A Cockney's Rural Sports," but these precedents alone are not sufficiently explanatory. The publication of original prose fiction in parts had been done as early as 1698, though it had never achieved the currency of the more familiar use of part issue, to publish reprinted fiction or non-fictional compendiums. Apparently, the only instance of a well-known novel to be published first in parts is Sir Launcelot Greaves, which Smollett had written as a serial for his British Magazine during 1760-61. However, again, unlike the popular reprints or the ongoing encyclopedic projects, such works appeared within the pages of magazines, and

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Dickens, The Pilgrim Edition: The Letters of Charles Dickens, eds. Madeline House and Graham Storey, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), I, 648; 12 February 1836. All subsequent page references to this work (and any of the further three volumes published to date in this edition) will appear in my text, preceded by "PL" and the appropriate volume number, and enclosed in parentheses. The appearance of square brackets around the dates given follows their use by the Pilgrim editors.



it was only in 1820 that Pierce Egan's Life in London very successfully combined in twelve numbers, coloured plates with letterpress which was meant to build up suspense for the appearance of the most impressive plate.

The narrative of Pickwick may eventually have been written up to the standard of Smollett, but as is generally known, its origin merely as an accompaniment to the project of an illustrator, led to its being refused by a number of writers before being accepted by Dickens. It seems that Dickens himself first saw it as another supplement, like that of the Sketches, to his income as a reporter, and he wrote to Catherine Hogarth that Chapman and Hall were going to pay him "£14 a month to write and edit a new publication they contemplate, entirely by myself; to be published monthly and each number to contain four wood cuts.... [T]he emolument is too tempting to resist" (PL, I, 128-29; [10 February 1836]). Eleven years later, in his preface to the first Cheap Edition of Pickwick, he wrote that the format proposed was associated for him with a

dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, which used, some five-and-twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars, and over some of which I remember to have shed innumerable tears.<sup>8</sup>

With hindsight, and the achievement since 1836, of a reputation as a novelist, Dickens had progressed from

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<sup>8</sup>Dickens, "Preface to the First Cheap Edition," Pickwick Papers, p. viii.

seeing Pickwick as a rather modish editorial project to talking about it as a novel in a format which he had retrieved from obscure disreputability--in fact, the sort of novel to which this quotation refers, has remained obscure. Dickens may have been familiar with the traditional cheap reprints of old novels, but the work actually commissioned from him in this case could only have begun to appear similar to those, later, when he, choosing to see himself as a descendent of Smollett rather than as an au courant young journalist, also chose to assimilate his past work into the necessary pattern of that reputation.

Nonetheless, in whatever way Dickens in February 1836 pictured to himself the shape of his future fame (and it must have changed every few months at this time), it is clear that he asked from the beginning to have more control over the narrative--as he tells us in his preface to the Cheap Edition of September 1847, which is his fullest account of what had happened when Chapman came to him with some of Seymour's plates. There, Dickens describes his immediate reactions to the scheme:

I objected...that the idea was not novel, and had been already much used; that it would be infinitely better for the plates to arise naturally out of the text; and that I should like to take my own way, with a freer range of English scenes and people, and was afraid I should ultimately do so in any case, whatever<sup>9</sup> course I might prescribe to myself at starting.

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<sup>9</sup>Dickens, "Preface to the First Cheap Edition," Pickwick Papers, p. ix.



Yet, reading over this account, one doubts whether Dickens put his feelings forward with quite as much self-assurance or so many conditions. Surely he would not have felt it so urgent to shape this offer of merely supplementary income according to the high-minded principles of a lifetime's work; and given all these stipulations, Chapman might reasonably have come to the conclusion that his firm should continue to look elsewhere for what they needed. But it should also be noted that when Dickens had collaborated with George Cruikshank on the book publication of the Sketches, which had just appeared when Pickwick was taken on, it had been the illustrator, whose name was at first more prominent than Dickens's own, who had nonetheless taken his lead from the writer.

The wilfulness with which Dickens took a strong line over the illustrations to "The Stroller's Tale" shows the contradictory make-up of his ambitions at this time. Certainly, this tale was written in a vein in which Dickens was prone to practise his authorial special effects; and subsequent discussion of Master Humphrey's Clock will show the extent of the belief he invested in such rhetoric. But the argument, that this and the other melodramatic interpolated tales were written to fit in with the main narrative of Pickwick, is not convincing.<sup>10</sup> On their own, they show the

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<sup>10</sup>Robert L. Patten, "The Art of Pickwick's Interpolated Tales," ELH 34 (September 1967): 349-66.

literary high-mindedness of a young writer, and his ambition to affect his audience strongly and ethically; placed in the context of Pickwick, they show, rather, the carelessness of a busy young man who, at first attempt, found the commissioned amount of prose harder to supply than he had thought: "The sheets are a weary length--I had no idea there was so much in them" (PL, I, 137; [?4 March 1836]). At this stage in his career, he sought both the maximum amount of work from publishers, and the maximum chance to display his varied talents--two ambitions not always as compatible as they first appeared.

Perhaps another of the reasons why Dickens and Seymour came into conflict about the direction of the project was that although the artist had completed seven etchings when Chapman took the proposal to Dickens, much of Seymour's preparation was negated by the fact that some had to be recast. This was because of Chapman's own request meanwhile for a benevolent fat man as the central figure of the pictorial narrative rather than the tall thin man which Seymour had drawn in; and the publisher may have invited the young author's opinion about this and other changes. In The Origin of Pickwick, Dexter and Ley discuss how Chapman could have been thinking both of a personal friend (described in his statement of 7 July 1849 about the genesis of Pickwick),<sup>11</sup> and of a

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<sup>11</sup>W. Dexter and J.W.T. Ley, The Origin of Pickwick (London: Chapman and Hall, 1936), pp. 89, 105.

Pickwick-like figure previously created by Seymour himself in a comic book about Cockneys fishing, in 1833.<sup>12</sup> Dickens's statement about Pickwick, in the preface to the Cheap Edition, is curiously straightforward and obfuscating at the same time:

My views being deferred to, I thought of Mr. Pickwick, and wrote the first number; from the proof sheets of which MR. SEYMOUR made his drawing of the Club, and that happy portrait of its founder, by which he is always recognized, and which may be said to have made him a reality. I connected Mr. Pickwick with a club, because of the original suggestion, and I put in Mr. Winkle expressly for the use of MR. SEYMOUR.<sup>13</sup>

In a later version of the preface, the conception of Pickwick, instead of being described as that "by which he is always recognized, and which may be said to have made him a reality," is said to have come after the fact of "MR. EDWARD CHAPMAN'S description of the dress and bearing of a real personage whom he had often seen."<sup>14</sup> Pickwick is connected with a club "because of the original suggestion," yet Seymour is said to have made its drawings from Dickens's text. Winkle is put in "for the use of Mr. Seymour"--Seymour's "use" of Winkle amounting to the fact that the wrapper already completed

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<sup>12</sup>Dexter and Ley, The Origin of Pickwick, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup>Dickens, "Preface to the First Cheap Edition," Pickwick Papers, p. ix.

<sup>14</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface," The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), p. ix.

depicted an incompetent Cockney marksman. Other than the wrapper, there were finally only two sporting scenes included from Seymour's plates, and Jingle's story of the dog who could read may have been one of the few concessions made to Seymour's convenience. Jingle himself may have been Dickens's own attempt to rewrite the character of the tall thin man posited by Seymour. If the hypothesis of Dexter and Ley is correct, then the figure of Pickwick was introduced secondly, only after Chapman's plea, but before Dickens saw the plates. Dickens might have seen the first drawings showing the adventures of a tall thin sportsman as well as those of a short round one, and pictures from both sets could have been used.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of the two chapters following "The Stroller's Tale," in which two sporting topics are portrayed, the text reverts to the editorial voice once again, after its having been thrown off at the end of the first chapter:

We are merely endeavouring to discharge in an upright manner, the responsible duties of our editorial functions; and whatever ambition we might have felt under other circumstances to

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<sup>15</sup> Looking over the plates done by Seymour, one notices, as well as the comic figure of Mr. Pickwick, the recurrence of a tall thin figure, which thus receives more attention in the illustrations than does Mr. Winkle in the text at this stage. Winkle may have been introduced into the text for Seymour's "use," but Dickens may also have found himself working hard in general to write adventures including a tall thin man--such as Jingle. In the plates Jingle differs from Winkle chiefly in having a Roman nose and rather more of a self-assured air. But the first story of himself, concerning the dog who could read no-trespassing signs, is illustrated by a cartoon of a tall thin man with the same expression of whimsical awkwardness as that of Mr. Winkle when he contends with the shying horse.

lay claim to the authorship of these adventures, a regard for truth forbids us to do more than claim the merit of their judicious arrangement and impartial narration....

Acting in this spirit, and resolutely proceeding on our determination to avow our obligations to the authorities we have consulted, we frankly say, that to the note-book of Mr. Snodgrass are we indebted for the particulars recorded in this, and the succeeding chapter--particulars, which, now that we have disburdened our conscience, we shall proceed to detail without further comment.  
(PP, 34)

So, according to prescription, the sporting adventures were resumed in this part of the narrative where Seymour's last two published illustrations appeared.

Thus we have the young author alternating his strategies, as he mediates between the demands of time, his own ambitions, and the needs of the new work. But the suicide of Seymour eliminated one tension, and left Dickens to struggle only with a monthly deadline and his own potentialities. Yet it is remarkable that just at this time Dickens made an agreement to write a three-volume novel for Macrone, the publisher who had been the first to take a chance on Dickens by putting his Sketches into book form in February 1836 (PL, I, 150; [9] May 1836). Apparently Pickwick, even freed from Seymour's outlines, did not strike Dickens as his first novel--however novel-like it came to appear.

In the preface written in 1837 for its first appearance in book form, Dickens felt obliged to explain his notions of its organization:

THE author's object in this work was to place before the reader a constant succession of characters and incidents; to paint them in as vivid colours as he could command; and to



render them at the same time, life-like and amusing....

The publication of the book in monthly numbers, containing only thirty-two pages in each, rendered it an object of paramount importance that, while the different incidents were linked together by a chain of interest strong enough to prevent their appearing unconnected or impossible, the general design should be so simple as to sustain no injury from this detached and desultory form of publication, extending over no fewer than twenty months. In short, it was necessary--or it appeared so to the author--that every number should be, to a certain extent, complete in itself, and yet that the whole twenty numbers, when collected, should form one tolerably harmonious whole, each leading to the other by a gentle and not unnatural progress of adventure.

It is obvious that in a work published with a view to such considerations, no artfully interwoven or ingeniously complicated plot can with reason be expected.<sup>16</sup>

This plainly and modestly sets out the artistic concerns about which Dickens felt he had to show himself knowledgeable. Yet he is not entirely content to renounce all claims to good fiction-writing:

And if it be objected to the *Pickwick Papers*, that they are a mere series of adventures, in which the scenes are ever changing, and the characters come and go like the men and women we encounter in the real world, he can only content himself with the reflection, that they claim to be nothing else, and that the same objection has been made to the works of some of the greatest novelists in the English language.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously, by the end of *Pickwick's* extraordinarily successful run, Dickens was seeing it under more ambitious aspects and categories than those with which it had started. He

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<sup>16</sup>Dickens, "Preface," *Pickwick Papers* (1837), pp. vii-viii.

<sup>17</sup>Dickens, "Preface," *Pickwick Papers* (1837), p. vii.

shows a touchy pride in comparing it to "the works of some of the greatest novelists in the English language." Pickwick might not be a novel but he was to be a novelist; and others besides himself had already seen much more in the prose of this periodical.

John Bull, reviewing it after the appearance of its third number, spoke of its potential "high place in the ranks of comic literature," and said after the sixth number, "Smollett never did anything better than the sixteenth chapter of the present number."<sup>18</sup> On 3 May 1837, when Pickwick had been running for just over a year, and Oliver Twist, in Bentley's Miscellany, for three months, Dickens spoke at the Anniversary Festival of the Literary Fund, in the company of many prominent writers, modestly acknowledging the honour of being toasted as a "rising author," but speaking also of his future gratitude "should he ever leave any work that should carry his name to posterity."<sup>19</sup>

That Dickens cultivated his future reputation jealously is shown by his alarm expressed to Forster, when a month later he learned of Macrone's project to re-issue the Sketches in the same format as Pickwick. He protested against this over-use of the successful green wrappers and also at the commonness of the name "Boz," which must

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<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Dexter and Ley, The Origin of Pickwick, p. 76.

<sup>19</sup>Charles Dickens, The Speeches of Charles Dickens, ed. K.J. Fielding (London:Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 1.

result from its simultaneous appearance on three periodicals.

By the time he came to write the preface to the Cheap Edition of Pickwick, in 1847, Dickens had written many successful books in this format. He could no longer afford to sneer at its ephemerality, for he was obviously continuing to make his reputation by it. Not only was Pickwick accepted as a work of fiction, but its mode of publication was setting a pattern for Victorian novel-writing. And yet, however pragmatic Dickens may have become, he had never given up his ideal of the well-made plot which he always associated with the skill of the true novelist, and had taught himself in his decade's experience of this form that plot could in fact be sustained in spite of all the difficulties he mentioned in 1837. Now he resolved these paradoxes by reiterating those difficulties, but also closing with the remark that, "Although, on one of these points, experience and study have since taught me something, and I could perhaps wish now that these chapters were strung together on a stronger thread of interest, still, what they are they were designed to be."<sup>20</sup>

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Yet then, it might be asked, which of his works did he conceive of as his first novel? And the answer lies partly in what he has to say in his letters and literary

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<sup>20</sup>Dickens, "Preface to the First Cheap Edition," Pickwick Papers, p. vii.



agreements. During the period when he was retrieving the copyright of the Sketches from Macrone, Dickens must have begun to consider the possible ramifications of all his various agreements with publishers. Again, on [?14 June 1837] he writes to Forster with some degree of panic, about how he stands with Bentley:

It is a very extraordinary fact (I forgot it on Sunday) that I have never had from him a copy of the agreement respecting the Novel which I never saw before or since I signed it at his house one morning long ago. Shall I ask him for a copy, or no? I have looked at some memoranda I made at the time, and I fear he has my second novel on the same terms, under the same agreement. This is a bad look-out, but n'importe--we will mend it.  
(PL, I, 270-71)

Looking at his agreement with Bentley of 22 August 1836, Dickens's fears proved to be warranted, and his solution in this predicament was to write to Bentley proposing new negotiations about "my first Novel Barnaby Rudge" and "my second Novel Oliver Twist" (PL, I, 283-84), and offering to deduct from the fee for the latter, all that had been paid "for the appearance of different portions of it in the Miscellany" (PL, I, 284; 14 July 1837). It was under these circumstances that Dickens first spoke of Oliver Twist as a novel in his letters or contracts. Probably he was already aware of the story's potential, but up until then its capacity for expansion had been more useful to him as a way of working up his monthly quota of material for the magazine. The commitment to making a three-volume novel of it would make its length and plotting far less dependent upon the usual pragmatic contingency.

At this point Dickens must have decided not to attempt

to complete its composition in serial form before presenting it as a novel, for there would not have been time or space to do so by the date of midsummer 1838 which he promised Bentley. During the summer months of 1837 when these tentative approaches to a new contract were being made, George Cruikshank was also consulted on this matter and his view of it gives one outlook on Oliver's changing shape at this sensitive time. He wrote to Bentley, on 15 September 1837, advising him to accept Dickens's terms for Oliver as the second novel:

--for I certainly am more convinced the more I think upon the subject that the public are heartily tired of "Oliver Twist" long before he reached to three Volumes and I should say more likely to injure the Miscellany than otherwise--People like Novelty--and other things might be studied equally interesting and entertaining.

(PL, I, 307-08, fn.4)

Cruikshank seems to assume--with an apprehension which seems strange now--that Bentley was going to make Dickens prolong Oliver in serial form until its end. But Dickens's subsequent strategy of withholding August's instalment in order to force Bentley's hand suggests both, that Dickens would not have borne this, and also, that Dickens and Bentley had understood Oliver's value as a serial far more quickly than Cruikshank--hence Dickens's use of it to negotiate for favours in the contract for a novel. Paradoxically, Oliver at this time existed in Dickens's mind both intrinsically, as a future novel, and also, as an ongoing magazine serial the present success of which could be used, quite separately, to bargain for

the sale of its own content as a novel. His purpose in talking about Oliver as a novel at this point rather than at some indefinite future stage of its progress was to get his other obligation to Bentley out of the way. This was finally achieved when Oliver appeared in three volumes in October 1838; but the contract for it as a novel comes to seem incidental, for Bentley counted enough on Oliver's value to him as a serial, to continue its publication in his Miscellany until November 1839.

When Dickens resumed Oliver again for the November 1837 number, he had to borrow from Bentley a copy of the February number where Oliver's early biography appeared (PL, I, 319; to E.S. Morgan [?13 October 1837]). Nonetheless, before negotiations had broken off with Bentley, he had defiantly introduced the last chapter (Fifteen) of the September number with an address beginning, "If it did not come strictly within the scope and bearing of my long-considered intentions and plans regarding this prose epic (for such I mean it to be)..."<sup>21</sup> In a rather ironic move--that reminds one of how later in life, when having just separated from his wife, he would think of calling his new weekly Household Harmony--he continues this passage with a high-minded dilation on the joys of practising unworldly charity for its own sake. This

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<sup>21</sup>Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 91n. All subsequent page references to this work will be incorporated in my text, preceded by "OT" and enclosed in parentheses.

persuasion of his reader or, more precisely, his publisher, notably did not appear when Oliver was published as a book.

When Bentley and Dickens finally resumed relations, their agreement of 22 September 1838 still referred to Oliver, in the clauses about Dickens's work for Bentley as an editor, as "a series of original articles called Oliver Twist" (PL, I, 667) which might appear in collected form at some future date; and, alternatively, as an "entire work" (PL, I, 669) which Bentley was prohibited from issuing "in the 'Standard Novels,' or in numbers, or in parts, or in any other manner or form than that of Post Octavo" (PL, I, 669-70). The contract also covered terms for "an original novel under the title of 'Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Great Riots,' to form when completed three volumes post octavo, each volume to contain not less than Three Hundred and Twenty pages of no less than Twenty-five lines each, the first half part of which shall appear in the said Miscellany in the same manner as the original papers under the title of 'Oliver Twist' have heretofore done" (PL, I, 670). Thus we see the anomalies which pervaded the status and description of Oliver and, nonetheless, the notable distinctions made between it and Barnaby Rudge, which was clearly thought of as a novel from the first. Only interpolated addresses to his reading public, did Dickens claim that Oliver had been determined as a "long-considered" "prose epic" from its inception. Once it was finished, having attained three-volume length, such an explicit signal to his readers

was dropped; nor did it possess any of the genial distinction of Henry Fielding's remarks to his readers.

Reasons have been put forward as to why Oliver might be considered as the novel which Dickens intended to be his first, but these are not entirely convincing. In a letter of [?10 December 1833] to H.W. Kelle, Dickens tells of the various sketches that have been published and of his future plans for writing:

I shall then please God commence a series of papers (the materials for which I have been noting down for some time past) called The Parish. Should they be successful & as publishing is hazardous, I shall cut my proposed Novel up into little Magazine Sketches.  
(PL, I, 33-34)

From this letter as well as other evidence, Kathleen Tillotson has suggested that the "proposed Novel" may have been Oliver Twist.<sup>22</sup> But the work would seem from this wording to have existed only in the form of a general proposal, not as unused material; in any case, by 1837 his sketch material, whatever it was, evidently had been used up, for he had difficulty in mustering a second series for Macrone and had utterly failed also to get together the novel promised for the end of 1836. In addition, when he began to write the first instalment of Oliver, he wrote to Bentley that he had "hit on a capital notion for myself, and one which will bring Cruikshank out" (PL, I, 224; [?18 January 1837]), and on [?20 January 1837], "Have you seen

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<sup>22</sup>Kathleen Tillotson, "Oliver Twist," Essays and Studies, New Series 12 (1959): 88-90.



Oliver Twist yet? I have taken a great fancy to him--I hope he deserves it" (PL, I, 225). In another letter he enthused: "perhaps the best subject I ever thought of...I have thrown my whole heart and soul into Oliver Twist, and must confidently believe he will make a feature in the work, and be very popular" (PL, I, 227; [24 January 1837]). These make Oliver sound more like a developing idea than the revision of a long-projected piece of work.

Although Dickens had long been familiar with, and interested in, the material which forms its background and was obviously alert to the many pathetic narratives that it could spawn, his experience with it in "Our Parish" and then in Oliver may show, rather, the amount of time and experimentation it took him to form a notion of its capabilities for the three-volume format. "The Parish" had appeared as a single article in February 1835, and it was not until May that another such piece, "Our Parish," appeared, which then became the first of the small series appearing once a month till August (twice in July). His demur at the end of the first instalment of Oliver--"I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative, (supposing it to possess any at all), if I ventured to hint, just yet, whether the life of Oliver Twist will be a long or a short piece of biography" (OT,12)--seems straightforward. As this was the first month in which Oliver had appeared, it was too early for Dickens to know if the public would even tolerate a long piece.

What was remarkable in this instance was Dickens's

personal feeling, from his first view of the subject, that there was a substantial story to be told about this single parish boy, a progress to be followed out from this small figure. The possibilities seen for Cruikshank perhaps suggests the notion of Hogarthian progress, and the later view of it as a "prose epic" must have highlighted other features of its potential expansion. But we may wonder what the inherent properties of this figure were, which made it so fertile for Dickens. We can never know exactly how many details and incidents his first idea comprehended, but the case may be that it projected itself adequately and forcefully enough for Dickens in terms of an entire emotional ground to be covered. Thus Oliver is important both as an instance where the process of a narrative's definition and organization can be observed, and also as a place for speculation about the shape of a narrative idea for Dickens--both processes which will be observed again.

As well as the transformation of Oliver into a novel, the renegotiated contract with Bentley was notable also for the change determined in the delivery of Barnaby Rudge. In September 1837 it was unquestionably the "first novel" contracted for; by September 1838, after it had become obvious that it could not be ready by October 1838, Dickens managed to arrange that he should be allowed to write it as a serial following Oliver in the Miscellany. Then, when he resigned from the editorship of the Miscellany in February 1838, he continued supplying monthly instalments

of Oliver, and Barnaby Rudge reverted to being promised as a novel, due by January 1840. To T.N. Talfourd he triumphantly announced his resignation and the fact that "Barnaby Rudge will be published next year as a Novel, and not in portions" (PL, I, 504; 31 January [1839]).

Of course, growing resentment with Bentley's advertisement of this date just as Dickens was vainly attempting to work on it after Nicholas Nickleby ended in October 1838, determined him to break with Bentley altogether, and by July 1840 he achieved this by having Chapman and Hall buy the rights to Barnaby Rudge from Bentley: once again it was to be a serial, this time of ten monthly numbers, each of two sheets like those of Pickwick and Nicholas Nickleby, or the same, divided into fifteen parts (PL, II, 476). By this time, however, Dickens found himself writing The Old Curiosity Shop as a weekly serial in order to save the failing Master Humphrey's Clock which was also being produced jointly with Chapman and Hall, and the latter were applying pressure also about the delivery of Barnaby Rudge for which they had supplied a hefty advance. By November 1840 the resolution to these problems appeared to be that Barnaby Rudge should also appear in weekly instalments in Master Humphrey's Clock after The Old Curiosity Shop. So that this, in fact, turned out to be the format in which Dickens's "first novel" appeared.

### iii

When Dickens first spoke of producing two novels



for Bentley, he wrote about taking into account "the time, the labour, the casting about, in every direction, for materials" and the "anxiety I should feel to make it a work on which I might build my fame" (PL, I, 165; [17 August 1836]). This was to some extent no more than a way of negotiating with Bentley, and the letter, as well as mentioning such difficulties, is also careful to speak hopefully of the outlook for sales. But clearly Dickens and his publisher agreed on the importance of the research needed for work on a novel. And when he finally got down to the planning of Barnaby Rudge, he did seem compelled to make it a work of research *à la* Scott, as if historical rather than merely contemporary features, were the suitable material for a work of enduring fame.

Studies of Oliver Twist sometimes enumerate the foundling tales which had been a popular species of fiction since the eighteenth century, and class Dickens as a practitioner in this genre.<sup>23</sup> But Dickens, as much as any twentieth-century researcher, would have regarded this as a phenomenon suitable for writers of minor fiction, and merely one gambit at which a rising author might try his skill. For even if these minor writers, who were often women, were commonly designated novelists, it should be noted that whenever Dickens mentions other novelists, it is generally always the litany of Defoe, Richardson,

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<sup>23</sup>For example, Robert A. Colby, Fiction with a Purpose (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967).

Smollett, and Fielding.

General assessments of his works by reviewers at this time mention Theodore Hook, Washington Irving, and Fielding--speaking of Dickens's great similarities in subject and gracefulness to the first two, respectively, and of his near approach to the skill of the last. The resemblance to Fielding's prose seems to be these reviewers' highest compliment, while it is usually stated without hesitation that he has already surpassed the two writers with whom he shares the more immediate charms of acute observation. Both the Quarterly Review (October 1837) and the London and Westminster Review (July 1837) note with surprise that someone who writes in "so very fugitive a form"<sup>24</sup> as Pickwick should have attracted serious critical interest at all, particularly under anonymity. Along with the Edinburgh Review they attempt to encourage Dickens to progress from sketch and periodical writing to more sustained narrative plotting:

We dwell on this defect in Mr Dickens's style, not because we think that he wants the powers of mind requisite for enabling him to supply it; but because we would especially point out to him the necessity for perfecting his powers, in order to put him in possession of one of the highest and most difficult qualifications of a great novelist.<sup>25</sup>

And writing when Nicholas Nickleby and Oliver Twist had

<sup>24</sup> Anon., London and Westminster Review 5 (July 1837): 194.

<sup>25</sup> Anon., London and Westminster Review 5 (July 1837): 200.

been appearing for a while, the Edinburgh Review still says of Oliver Twist,

Unfinished as this tale still is, it is the best example which Mr Dickens has yet afforded of his power to produce a good novel; but it cannot be considered a conclusive one.<sup>26</sup>

This review bears the running title "Dickens's Tales" and, excepting in this passage, refers to him otherwise as a "writer of fiction." It would seem from all these articles that the title of "novelist" is a clearly demarcated promotion. Forster's reviews in the Examiner (12 March 1837; 10 September 1837; 19 November 1837) support this, predicting in September that Oliver "promises to take its place among the higher prose fictions of the language."<sup>27</sup> Some scrupulousness is apparent in his surprise at some of the low-life details that he finds "such a writer as Mr. Dickens resorting to,"<sup>28</sup> but this is pardoned by a lavish admiration everywhere of Dickens's gift for realistic observation. Similarly, the writer in the Edinburgh Review had ended optimistically, by saying that "we know no writer who seems likely to attain higher success in that rich and useful department of fiction which is founded on faithful representations of human character,

<sup>26</sup> Anon., "Dickens's Tales," Edinburgh Review 68 No. 137 (October 1838): 96.

<sup>27</sup> John Forster, The Examiner (10 September 1837): 581

<sup>28</sup> Forster, The Examiner (10 September 1837): 581

as exemplified in the aspects of English life."<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile in November 1837 Dickens had a contract with Chapman and Hall for a "new Book or work the title whereof has not yet been decided on of similar character and of the same extent and contents in point of quantity as the said work entitled 'The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club'" (PL, I, 659; 18 November 1837), and had decided to make observation of Yorkshire schools supply material for his next story. Once again, it was not clear whether the new work was to be seen as a novel or an entertaining serialised ramble. The "Nickleby Proclamation" of 28 February 1838 announced

That in our new work, as in our preceding one, it will be our aim to amuse, by producing a rapid succession of characters and incidents, and describing them as cheerfully and pleasantly as in us lies; that we have wandered into fresh fields and pastures new, to seek materials for the purpose; and that, in behalf of Nicholas Nickleby, we confidently hope to enlist both their heartiest merriment and their kindest sympathies.<sup>30</sup>

Judging by the review of Nicholas Nickleby in the Examiner of 27 October 1839, Dickens succeeded in satisfying these hopes, but disappointed other unspoken expectations:

And with all these masterly requisites for his art is Mr Dickens a perfect novelist? By no means.

<sup>29</sup>Anon., "Dickens's Tales," Edinburgh Review 68 No. 137 (October 1838): 97.

<sup>30</sup>Charles Dickens, "The Nickleby Proclamation," reproduced in Michael Slater, "The Composition and Monthly Publication of Nicholas Nickleby" (Menston: Scolar Press, 1973), pp. 20-21 [p. 3].

He has yet to acquire the faculty of constructing a compact and effective story without which that rank can never be attained.<sup>31</sup>

It comes to the conclusion that if Dickens's talent for characterization were combined with more economy of plotting, he would soon achieve all that the best novelists before had done, for, "The creative powers of the novelist, when properly directed and well-sustained, take rank with history."<sup>32</sup> One notes, as with the concluding words of the Edinburgh Review article, the implication that history and historical writing is the ideal of the art of the novelist, whose more enduring fame distinguishes him from among other writers of fiction.

The role of this hierarchical notion in nineteenth-century thought is a study in itself, but its significance for Dickens at this point may be attempted. Briefly, it may be said that historical writing as it was then practised assumed the notions of causality and teleology in order to understand or rationalise the contemporary state of affairs. The status quo of the present denoted the culmination of human life achieved so far, and

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<sup>31</sup> [Leigh Hunt] The Examiner (27 October 1839): 677. Philip Collins in The Critical Heritage ascribes this review to Forster, but A.W.C. Brice's research on "John Forster as a Critic of Fiction" (Unpub. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1971) suggests that in fact it was written by Leigh Hunt. Brice also gives details about the authorship of other Examiner reviews of Dickens--the relevant point here is that whoever the reviewer in a particular instance, Dickens knew all these men and would have been sensitive to the opinions of this circle as they were expressed in the Examiner.

<sup>32</sup> [Leigh Hunt] The Examiner (27 October 1839): 678.



history was a useful moral philosophy or science which unravelled the forces behind its past and future. Of course, Scott was the novelist most commonly associated with historical narrative, but it seemed to be conceded generally that he had no philosophical apprehension of his material equal to his talent for rendering the idiosyncracies of historical character with acute vividness.

These dichotomies are typically discussed by Edward Bulwer, in a review of Tales of My Landlord, in 1832:

The historical event is referred to for the purpose of giving consistency and probability to the plot, and the persons are introduced as the landmarks of the age whereof the matters are representative. Opportunity is thus afforded to instruct as well as to amuse, and to make an effort of a higher kind than is necessary to the description of the characters, in the careful elaboration of a vigorous sketch or full-length portrait of the Colossus who then "bestrode our little world."<sup>33</sup>

This review demonstrates the attitude that prose fiction was the lower form of narrative but that it could acquire substance by the infusion of historical patterning and detail. The intrinsic formal relevance of this to the novel has been well expressed in our own day by J. Hillis Miller in "Narrative and History":

The formal structure of a novel is usually conceived of as the gradual emergence of its meaning. This coincides with its end, the

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<sup>33</sup> [Sir Edward Bulwer] "Historical Romance," Unsigned review of Tales of My Landlord, 4th series, Fraser's Magazine 5 (February 1832): 18-19.



fulfillment of the teleology of the work  
[and]...This sense of an ending articulates  
all the parts as the backbone of the narrative.<sup>34</sup>

What the Examiner review of Nicholas Nickleby was objecting  
to in Dickens's fiction so far was that

the grander effects of some of his most  
masterly and powerful writing in the latter  
chapters is marred by the introduction of  
matters, needful indeed to a gathering up  
of the loose or broken threads of an imperfect  
story, but sounding more like the minute  
recitals of a lawyer's deed than the natural  
development of a book of so much originality  
and genius.<sup>35</sup>

Dickens's early works generally leave a feeling of  
extraneousness at the end because of the inclusion of  
elements which apparently remain unsubsumed by an Idea  
like that which History offered to Scott. Such elements  
flouted the "sense of an ending," the sense of a state  
of affairs completely explainable and therefore reassuring.  
Indeed, "explainable" carries the implication that something  
can take its place in a narrative, and hence, form part  
of a progression towards a meaning.

The sense that Dickens lacked an organizing idea to  
articulate the situations of his characters at any point  
in his narrative seems to imply that Dickens had not  
formulated, as say Carlyle did, an adequate moral and  
intellectual judgement about his contemporaneous world.  
And yet we have already noticed that the reviewer in the  
Examiner, and many others, who bemoaned Dickens's lack

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<sup>34</sup>J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative and History,"  
ELH 41 (Fall 1974):460-61.

<sup>35</sup>[Leigh Hunt] The Examiner (27 October 1839): 677.

of narrative logic, gave the highest praise to his rendition of contemporary life. In fact, it would be ludicrous to claim that Dickens was other than passionate about the moral and political state of his **society**. How then was his writing, at the time when he was making the transition from a "writer of fiction" to a novelist, different from that which yearned after the historical sense of validity?

This transition is complicated, of course, by developments in his career shown in the next chapter: along with an increase in story-telling technique, grew a weariness with the sheer amount of prose constantly demanded of him, and hence also, the effort to find an outlet as an editor and not just as a producer. At that time the chance for him to study his art more clearly would have impossible and uncongenial, and the preface to Nicholas Nickleby, written in September 1839 shows this, when it praises the periodical writer as a "man of feeling," linked to his public by an immediacy of emotion far more permanently, in fact, than the writer who contemplates his words with intellectual coolness.

However, by the time he wrote the first preface to Oliver Twist, Master Humphrey's Clock had failed as a miscellany, ironically only to be saved by another continuous tale. So in the preface to Oliver, written in April 1841, we find Dickens once again contending with the criticism he had first met after Pickwick. Like his

reviewers, he holds up the talismanic names of "Fielding, De Foe, Goldsmith, Smollett, Richardson, Mackenzie" (OT, lxiv). Yet the difference here is that Dickens is not speaking of these novelists' aesthetic economies of construction. True, before this, he speaks of a settled intention "to shew, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last" (OT, lxii). But throughout, he is overwhelmingly concerned to answer the charges that the book's subject and materials were degraded and unworthy of being considered by serious minds; and the names above are invoked as peers, not idols--

all these for wise purposes, and especially the two first brought upon the scene the very scum and refuse of the land....And yet, if I turn back to days in which he [Hogarth] or any of these men flourished, I find the same reproach levelled against them every one, each in his turn, by the insects of the hour, who raised their little hum and died, and were forgotten. (OT, lxiv)

Strenuously contradicting the learned men of the quarterlies who would hold Art indefinitely over his head while he might struggle for evermore to make a living, Dickens here asserts the privilege which he sees as giving him authentic access to that tradition: that of telling the Truth. Given this, the charges of ephemerality and vulgarity can be scorned. Whatever elements of the story are not felt to satisfy the assumptions of "History" and the certain coherency which that discipline implies, may be explained by Truth, which yields to no aesthetic

prescriptives:

Here are no canterings upon moonlit heaths, no merry-makings in the snuggest of all possible caverns, none of the attractions of dress, no embroidery, no lace, no jackboots, no crimson coats and ruffles, none of the dash and freedom with which "the road" has been, time out of mind, invested. The cold, wet, shelterless midnight streets of London; the foul and frowsy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn; the haunts of hunger and disease, the shabby rags that scarcely hold together: where are the attractions of these things? Have they no lesson, and do they not whisper something beyond the little-regarded warning of a moral precept?

But there are people of so refined and delicate a nature that they cannot bear the contemplation of these horrors. Not that they turn instinctively from crime; but that criminal characters, to suit them, must be, like their meat, in delicate disguise. ...It is wonderful how virtue turns from dirty stockings; and how Vice, married to ribbons and a little gay attire, changes her name, as wedded ladies do, and becomes Romance.  
(OT, lxiii)

In the insistence on retaining the idiosyncracies of the setting with which Oliver had begun, Dickens had moved from seeing himself as the writer of a miscellaneous piece of contemporary satire to being an innovator in fictional stylization. It is not supposed here that Dickens had formulated these ideas, four years earlier, when he had sat down to compose the February instalment for Bentley's Miscellany. The preface is, rather, a postscript, a justification after the fact, although it is possible to see that this part of the argument was thought out at least by the eighteenth chapter and sixth number of Nicholas Nickleby, where the narrator begins a chapter on Kate Nickleby's sufferings with

the admonition:

THERE are many lives of much pain, hardship, and suffering, which, having no stirring interest for any but those who lead them, are disregarded by persons who do not want thought or feeling, but who pamper their compassion and need high stimulants to rouse it....A thief in fustian is a vulgar character, scarcely to be thought of by persons of refinement; but dress him in green velvet, with a high-crowned hat, and change the scene of his operations from a thickly-peopled city to a mountain road, and you shall find in him the very soul of poetry and adventure. So it is with the one great cardinal virtue, which, properly nourished and exercised, leads to, if it does not necessarily include, all the others. It must have its romance; and the less of real hard struggling work-a-day life there is in that romance, the better.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact is that although Oliver Twist shows much more effort at "plotting," Dickens's way of writing, born out of the exigencies of his livelihood and readiest talents often unravels all the established apparatus of teleological narrative handed down to the novel from history. Discontinuity, "unnecessary" repetition, contradiction --all the artistic violations committed against the spectre of Fielding--were committed, unwillingly, by this writer who always thought that he would, nonetheless, get around to writing Gabriel Vardon, after Pickwick--or Nickleby, or Oliver--was out of the way.

Yet it is not incorrect to say that the "man of feeling" was there throughout--all the readers and critics

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, ed. Michael Slater (1838-39; Menston: Scolar Press, 1972), No. VI, Chp. 18, p. 161. All subsequent page references to this work will be incorporated in my text, preceded by "NN" and enclosed in parentheses.



testified unreservedly to that. Perhaps the Nickleby preface was the wisest and truest one Dickens ever wrote. But unable for the moment to apply its tenets in the form most apparently suited to them, Dickens returned to struggle with continuous narrative under the shadow of the Novel. Finally, given the premisses of the Nickleby preface of 1839, the preface to Oliver Twist in 1841 offers exactly the argument which a "man of feeling" needs if he wishes to turn a magazine into a novel: he has to show not just how Oliver arrives at the last tableau with Rose Maylie (an exercise in plotting), but what it was like on the way and why it is that "without strong affection, and humanity of heart, and gratitude to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe, true happiness can never be attained" (OT, 368). Instead of a passage from Fielding at the head of his preface, Dickens should have quoted Goldsmith, on the suffering of prostitutes in the London streets:

Why, why was I born a man, and, yet see the sufferings of wretches I cannot relieve! Poor houseless creatures! the world will give you reproaches, but will not give you relief. The slightest misfortunes, the most imaginary uneasinesses of the rich, are aggravated with all the power of eloquence and engage our attention; while you weep unheeded, persecuted by every subordinate species of tyranny, and finding enmity in every law.

Why was this heart of mine formed with so much sensibility! or why was not my fortune adapted to its impulse! Tenderness, without a capacity of relieving, only makes the heart



that feels it more wretched than the  
object which sues for assistance.<sup>37</sup>

Goldsmith wrote this in The Bee (it was also included slightly changed in The Citizen of the World), and the resemblances of the opening number of Master Humphrey's Clock to this piece, a year before the preface to Oliver Twist appeared, will be discussed in the next chapter. Just as Goldsmith's Bee proved commercially unfeasible, so the persona of Master Humphrey was not able to sustain the miscellaneous form of the magazine which Dickens attempted. Yet in the preface to Oliver Twist, such a sensibility stands as his angry and successful defence of the elements of the miscellany which survived in the novel. The continuous tale apparently craved by his readers is supplied, but the consistency in hero or heroine has become, not so much the means to the more uniform plot demanded by the critics, as a centre for the diversity and range of topic which Dickens desires to incorporate. He naturally continued to be sensitive to the literary ideas of the quarterlies and to work at proficiency in "plotting," but his peculiar talents had already found another, more compatible, sense of organization.

Dickens may have discovered in Oliver Twist how to

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<sup>37</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, The Bee 4 (27 October 1759), Collected Works, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), I, 423. Also found in Citizen of the World, Letter CXVII, Collected Works, II, 453-54.

show the triumph of the principle of Good, and projected Martin Chuzzlewit as the defeat of Selfishness--thereby evincing a desire to tighten his structure and achieve a type of historical logic--but, in fact, the respective outlines of virtue's ascent are often overwhelmed in the prose itself by the varieties of evil against which they are contrasted. In Martin Chuzzlewit, particularly, the self-conscious effort to supply a "proper" ending immanent with moral logic, seems flatly asserted by a rhetorical idea of moral progress, which is itself everywhere deconstructed by the present tense of Dickens's characterizations. In short, we can enjoy Tom Pinch's unworldliness in all his adventures but little about them compels proselytization about the hierarchical position of unworldliness. Dickens's humour in this representation has already made such rhetoric both unnecessary and even undesirable. For the humour is equally a persuasive instrument, possessing its own "logic," though it be neither causal nor linear. Its immediacy, its use of contingency and repetition, constitute as much of a "world-view" as any syllogistic summary.

## iv

In the same way, explanations of the "meaning" of Sam Weller's speeches can never recapture their persuasiveness; nor can any outlines of Pickwick's "plot" determine this. To classify it as a fable wherein various manners and scenes of life are exhibited for the ultimate moral edification of the Pickwickians, who will finally choose

among them and thereby indicate the pertinent didactic point of the story, may be a tempting intellectual response. But the concern here is, rather, to suggest discursively, a description of Pickwick which will correspond more closely to one's actual reading experience. For if it is compared with a tale such as A Christmas Carol, which has the form of a traditional self-contained fable, we see that such a narrative is more like the inset tale of Gabriel Grub than the entire adventures of Pickwick --thus making one feel the gap between a complex reading experience and the ready terms of intellectual summary. Although the Pickwickian adventures may also seem to have all the necessary ingredients for effecting a strong moral change in their hero, he remains the observer, whose adventures will be, in his own words, no more than "a source of amusing and pleasant recollections to me in the decline of life" (PP, 605). We are instructed to recall, not a fabular "moral," but the fables, anecdotes, and jokes which comprise all that comes under the collective label of Pickwickian; for the ultimate Pickwickian fable denotes a plurality of fables.

Sam Weller is a recognized source of anecdote and fable. His compact one-liners are scattered throughout the novel, although his first full-length story does not occur until Chapter Thirty, in the eleventh number. Nonetheless, the story of the sausage-man, for example, is really little more than an extended anecdotal remark,

rather than a fully-plotted story. It is, quite literally, a passing remark both for Mr. Pickwick, as he and Sam walk through the streets past the houses and shopfronts of London, and for the reader as he reads through this chapter concerning Pickwick's encounter with the Law. This encounter constitutes the single most extended and homogenous action of the novel and is therefore prominent; whereas Sam's story of the sausage man changes the novels neither formally nor thematically, but merely in duration. Although the situation of a gentle and proud man harrassed by a contentious woman does resemble somewhat his own predicament, Pickwick himself appends no response or reflection which might relate the sausage-man's story to anything else in the novel, nor does it appear to have any effect on his behaviour. This story is just an effort made by Sam, "who was always especially anxious to impart to his master any exclusive information he possessed" (PP, 319), to make contact with, and perhaps even console and divert, Pickwick, who otherwise walks "plunged in profound meditation" (PP, 319). The elicitation of the sausage-maker's story from an otherwise unnotable cityscape may transform the mental scenery of the journey, which for Pickwick and the reader has been governed so far by thoughts about the impending difficulties.

Similarly, the story of the crumpet-eater in Chapter Forty-Three, told when Pickwick has just entered prison, would also seem to be consolatory. Pickwick is still uneasy about Sam's announced determination to accompany

him in prison, and Sam, seeking to change the vexatious subject and press his point, relates the tale of the crumpet-lover who also is said to have taken extreme action "on principle" (PP, 467). Totally at odds with its melancholy and tragic surroundings, the crumpet-lover's story remains impertinently lively and jocular, and even the hero's fate somehow persists in seeming cheery rather than sad. By its conclusion Pickwick is reconciled at least tacitly to Sam's presence. The stories of both sausage-maker and crumpet-eater, though far from offering any explicit moral exhortations, strengthen the bonds between master and servant, and thereby foster also a loving and cheerful attitude towards life in general.

This is analogous to the implications of that passage in Virginia Woolf's novel To the Lighthouse where, sitting alone with her husband, Mrs. Ramsay becomes conscious of a desire to have him merely speak to her: "Anything, anything, she thought, going on with her knitting. Anything will do."<sup>38</sup> Such is the "anything," the gesture that Sam Weller offers when he points out the sausage shop to Pickwick; the Ramsays eventually talk about Paul and Minta's engagement and the stocking she is knitting, Sam and Mr. Pickwick, about a sausage-maker and his shrewish wife. Whether it be the vicissitudes of Mrs. Ramsay's

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<sup>38</sup> Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (1927; Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books, 1964; rpt. 1970), p. 140.

inner consciousness or the fortunes of *Pickwick*, we must read these rambling, freely-associative, narratives with complete and easy acceptance of the links they make and the episodes their authors have chosen to include; regardless of thematic patterning which may be noted subsequently, both narratives make, first of all, a strong impression of pure sequentiality upon the reader. The miscellaneousness of the episodes and impressions singled out denotes only the generous dimensions of the consciousness which creates it--under this identity of quicksilver feeling are they coalescent.

Sam Weller telling stories to his master is only the most continuous example of affectionate intercourse between Dickens's characters, but the frequency of the domestic or public house fireside as a setting for the telling of stories in *Pickwick* suggests the strong element of human congeniality in these exercises. Even the death of Sam's stepmother is both one of the most amusing and one of the most memorable stories in the novel. The letter describing her death and Tony Weller's oral account of her decline and last words are modestly elegaic. But this letter also includes, along the way, the description of the "shepherd" preacher as he drank and ranted through the night (thereby leading Mrs. Weller to catch her death of cold while listening to him in the rain and on damp grass) and the characterization of Mrs. Weller's decline as a stagecoach taking the wrong road:



her veels was immedety greased and everythink done to set her agoin as could be inwented your farther had hopes as she vould have vorked round as usual but just as she was a turnen the corner my boy she took the wrong road and vent down hill with a welocity you never see and nothvithstandin that the drag wos put on drectly by the medikel man it wornt of no use at all for she paid the last pike at twenty minutes afore six o'clock yesterday evenin havin done the journey wery much under the reglar time vich praps was partly owen to her haven taken in wery little luggage.  
(PP, 555)

The passage wherein Tony Weller speaks of his sorrow at her death opens with the announcement that he is deaf to all calls because he is "In a referee" (PP, 557), and closes with a philosophical reflection on the agency of Providence and the rhetorical conjecture--"Wot 'ud become of the undertakers vithout it, Sammy?" (PP, 557). The profundity of Mr. Weller's sorrow may never be in doubt, but the satire in his expression of it is still amusing. As in the story of the crumpet-eater's suicide, Dickens "plays" with the most serious rhetorical occasions of life and death, by mixing them interchangeably with the comedy of manners. Tony Weller relates the progress of his wife's decline in the sort of vocabulary and narrative most familiar to him; and in the unspoken contrast which Wellerisms make to the conventions of poetic narrative surrounding death, a dismantling of literary decorum takes place. This sort of writing in which the literary language is infiltrated by layers of another cultural language makes far more impact than any mere repetition he makes of the convention, as for example, in the

deathbed scene of "The Stroller's Tale."

Hence the effectiveness of Jingle also, whose narratives are subtly satiric up until his reformation, when his statements become much less ambitious in length and fancy. As well as being coolly humorous about the angry cabman, he can also be deftly mocking of the genteel Pickwick and his companions, and even some of the pretensions of their readers. When Pickwick, in his character as an amateur philosopher, explains his absentmindedness by a remark that he is "ruminating...on the strange mutability of human affairs" (PP, 9), Jingle neatly deflates his friend's intellectual aspirations: "Ah, so am I. Most people are when they've little to do and less to get" (PP, 9). He lampoons Snodgrass's status as the poet of the group with his imitation of an epic poet:

Epic poem--ten thousand lines--revolution of  
July--composed it on the spot--Mars by day,  
Apollo by night,--bang the field-piece, twang  
the lyre.

fired a musket,--fired with an idea,--rushed  
into wine shop--wrote it down--back again--whiz,  
bang--another idea--wine shop again--pen and  
ink--back again--cut and slash--noble time, Sir.  
(PP, 9)

Winkle's claim as a sportsman is ridiculed by the anecdote of a dog who can "read," and the vulgar Byronic romance of the times epitomized in the fat Tupman is caricatured by Jingle's tale of his Spanish love:

Don Bolaro Fizzgig--Grandee--only daughter--Donna  
Christina--splendid creature--loved me to  
distraction--jealous father--high-souled  
daughter--handsome Englishman--Donna Christina  
in despair--prussic acid--stomach pump in my  
portmanteau--operation performed--old Bolaro

in ecstacies--consent to our union--join  
hands and floods of tears--romantic story--very.  
(PP, 10)

Yet in spite of the pointed relevance of Jingle's narratives and commentaries, it is never suggested that Jingle could be a commentator from whom Pickwick learns about his vaunted vocation as an observer of human nature. The fate of Jingle demonstrates how "play" eventually comes to be displaced by logical and thorough development of the consequences of his moral position.

The inclusion of the melodramatic interpolated tales among the Pickwickian adventures shows the conflicts present in the narrative format of Pickwick. Indicating that Dickens had high hopes for the effect to be produced by the first of these, "The Stroller's Tale," Robert L. Patten quotes from a letter to Seymour in which Dickens writes that "many literary friends, on whose judgment I place reliance, think it will create considerable sensation"<sup>39</sup>--a statement of tentative pride in his young literary virtuosity which may have been its own justification for offering this tale. The verses of "The Ivy Green" which preceded the next tale were included for similar reasons: "Dickens' brother-in-law, Henry Burnett, told F.G. Kitton that 'The Ivy Green' was written before Pickwick, that it had been set to music at Dickens'

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<sup>39</sup>Robert L. Patten, "Pickwick's 'Interpolated' Tales," Dickens Studies Newsletter 1 (1970): 8.



request and sung 'scores of times,' and that it had been so admired that Dickens decided to insert it in a monthly number."<sup>40</sup> Although it seems likely that the third story, "A Madman's Manuscript," may have been written at the same time as its surrounding narrative, its genesis may bear more relation to the fact that Dickens visited Bedlam in June 1836 as part of his research for the novel which in May he had promised Macrone and at the same time when he was writing the July instalment in which this story appears. It provides no insight into the past or future behaviour of Pickwick himself.

The arguments that these tales were composed integrally with the material surrounding them seek to imply that Pickwick was conceived with a Meaning and hence, a plot, which would work out this Idea, and the interpolated tales are put forward as part of this narrative logic. This is done mainly by trying to show that ideas derived from these tales (which in themselves are "plotted" to elicit specific affects) are also illustrated by the Pickwickian adventures. Moreover, some commentators would call Pickwick an illustrative fable, in the sense that it uses the stability of its characters as moral counters which

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<sup>40</sup>Patten, "Pickwick's 'Interpolated' Tales,"  
p. 8.

can be slotted into various educative sequences of action--and yet, in the same discussion, go on to describe the naturalistic transformation of Pickwick.<sup>41</sup> This critical confusion in sorting out the modes of the characters quite reasonably reflects the very real mixture of narrative modes in the work itself, and so the necessary inaccuracy of placing it under a single formal heading. The concern here is not to discuss the characterization in Pickwick but the novel's characters inasmuch as their conception reflects on the narrative method.

The characters and stories of Pickwick have one immediate similarity and link: their miscellaneous abundance. There has been comment on the need for a critical account which can bring out this quality,<sup>42</sup> and apart from G.K. Chesterton's effusive reiteration of all the things he enjoys in the Dickens world, perhaps the most interesting, if curious, modern attempt to provide this is offered by Stephen Marcus' essay, "Language into Structure: Pickwick Papers." Obviously, the thorough analysis of every word and phrase cannot feasibly be undertaken with any novel, let alone Pickwick, but the

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<sup>41</sup>James R. Kincaid, Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) pp. 20-49.

<sup>42</sup>Gabriel Pearson, "Dickens: The Present Position," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, eds. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. xvii-xxiv.



fetish for the Word can be diverted into another application: from the concern with "the fundamental activity of the Logos"<sup>43</sup> in the singular, Marcus moves to demonstrating its activity in multiplication, in plurality. The over-contrived presentation of the Pickwickian club's mock-parliamentary proceedings, Dickens's training in shorthand writing, Pickwick's antiquarian analysis of Bill Stump's "mark," all dramatize the insights which they profess: that the absence of any referable meaning creates its own sensation and sense of meaning. The spending of a page in wooden verbal currency becomes itself a satirical statement on the Word.

And the perception of Dickens's writing in Pickwick as a type of "doodling" verbal spontaneity, seems to inspire an extension of the critic's own linguistic tools, an attempt to talk about the novel's motion in language, partly by reproducing that motion in critical language. Thus:

Jingle is an approximation of uninflected linguistic energy. He seems incoherent but he is not; his speech proceeds rapidly and by associations; his syntactical mode is abbreviatory and contracted; his logic is elliptical, abstractly minimal, and appositional.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Stephen Marcus, "Language into Structure: Pickwick Papers," Representations (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 220.

<sup>44</sup>Marcus, p. 228.



Whether we enjoy Marcus' prose as much as Dickens's is unlikely, but his point is an acceptable one--if the reader can grasp it in more than a Pickwickian sense:

He [Jingle] brings us into closer touch with the primary process. He is moreover the first expression of the "constant succession" that Dickens mentions in his preface to the first edition; but the constant succession, as it first appears here and will persist throughout the novel, is the constant succession of writing, of characters rising up to speak in print in unending torrents of words, of language in incessant motion, of writing apparently and extraordinarily writing itself....The novel thus proceeds to make itself, by this continuous succession of kinds of writing spontaneously introduced--and that, for the most part is what constitutes its structure.<sup>45</sup>

It is debatable whether or not the interpolated tales manifest such spontaneity: their placing, at least, partially conveys the impression of improvisation and natural profusion.

Yet Marcus would say of the interpolated tales that they are "obsessional," the opposite of free play and that, with the Fleet episode, more confined, preoccupied with "intensities and obsessions and closeness and deprivation and filth....That writing, which before was free, has become like Mr. Pickwick himself engaged and involved with society...extralinguistic phenomena....Thus he involving himself in a fictional action which would negate the freedom of speech which he celebrates in this first novel, and his entire future development is contained by anticipation in

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<sup>45</sup>Marcus, p. 228; p. 237.

that nullification.<sup>46</sup>

Dickens--perhaps in the grip of a personal ambition to make people "believe in" him--has, in turn, fallen hard for the belief that his writing can summon up the presence of emotional assent in his readers. There is, throughout these episodes, a demand that the words be fully meaningful. Somehow the play on "Chops and Tomata sauce" has landed the Pickwickian narrative in a denotation of the misery encompassed by the walls of the Fleet prison. Of course, Dickens had early been aroused by this very fact that the legal sport with words that went on in the country's courts did have very palpable consequences for people who were at least innocent of the treacherousness of such words; and Marcus is correct in noting the connection of these two types of writing in Dickens's career. When Jingle is first encountered inside Fleet prison, he satirizes his own sufferings:

Everything--Job's too--all shirts  
gone--never mind--saves washing. Nothing  
scon--lie in bed--starve--die--Inquest--little  
bone-house--poor prisoner--common necessaries  
--hush it up--gentlemen of the jury--warden's  
tradesmen--keep it snug--natural death--coroner's  
order--workhouse funeral--serve him right--all  
over--drop the curtain.  
(PP, 454)

But at the end of this shorthand pathos, Pickwick sees that the eyes of the jokester are now full of tears; and subsequently Jingle's speech is bereft of irony.

Jingle is an example of free play taken over by

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<sup>46</sup>Marcus, p. 244; p. 245.

"involvement"; Sam Weller preserves linguistic freedom. Thus Jingle's facetiousness becomes thoroughly assimilated by prison, while Sam remains impertinently cheerful. Comparing the treatment of prison in Pickwick to that in Little Dorrit, we think of the "play" inherent in the depiction of William Dorrit's life in prison at the beginning of the novel and the high moral seriousness of Arthur Clennam's experience of it with which the novel ends, or the complementary experiences undergone by Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley in Eden. Side by side, one character in each of these pairs (Jingle, Arthur Clennam, Martin Chuzzlewit) is developed dramatically for the purposes of "Plot" and a didactic idea, while the other (Sam Weller, William Dorrit, Mark Tapley) seems representative of an anecdotal characterology. Analogously, one notes this principle of contrast and complement working, in that heavily plotted tales are distributed among Pickwickian adventures, and vice versa, picaresque anecdotes relieve the sustained gloom of Pickwick in prison.

Dickens perhaps showed that he admired the principle of combining relaxation with tension, and varying the degrees of pressure by his interpolation of macabre tales in both Pickwick and Master Humphrey's Clock, but he had not yet achieved that combination within the prose itself, except perhaps in the speech of the Wellers. The narratives of these romances never really sustain a new mood or strategy in the way that their intensity would suggest they were meant to, but are merely shorn of the

detailed topical surroundings and manners for which Dickens had become known in his Sketches. If we compare them with an instance of Dickens writing successfully in this mode, as in the taut romance of passages by the omniscient narrator in Bleak House, we realize that there such details are not omitted but, rather, are recurringly sounded as part of a total sustained symbolic rhetoric.

Surprisingly, the pathetic stories in "Our Parish" --perhaps because of a necessarily abbreviated and deft touch--seem less intrusively done than those in Pickwick. Indeed, the opening paragraph of the first Sketch of "The Parish" begins with a tale of woe; but it is over and done with in one paragraph, and in the next, the reader is laughing at the overseer of such chronicles, the parish beadle. This juxtaposition is also present in Oliver Twist, where the pathos of Oliver's circumstances intermingles oddly but effectively with the satire of parish manners: Mr. Bumble is both the fearsome villain and a ridiculous provincial official. Our ability to laugh at Mr. Pickwick's mishaps grows to the degree that we also begin to develop sympathy for him, and Sam Weller is the very figure to heighten both these responses. There is no corresponding foil attached to Master Humphrey, and not until Dickens had launched into the pathos of Little Nell's story, did the reader also have the amusement of Dick Swiveller's.

It seems to be that Dickens's satire accompanies those figures of "play," especially those such as Sam Weller and Jingle whose irreverence towards language provides a good medium for rhetorical satire of English life and institutions, whereas "involved" characters whose psychological transformations are featured, seem to exclude the satiric vision. The peculiar quality of the latter is to indulge the melancholy mood, while the former displays its own virtuosity in subverting the malevolent forces of modern life. It is noteworthy that this dichotomy is the subject of the very first interpolated tale, the "Stroller's Tale" from which Dickens anticipated recognition as a story-teller: the clown in all his wretchedness and misery, and the clown whose tumbles on stage raise laughter, are two beings inhabiting the one body which alternately evokes pathos and amusement in its postures.

This is, above all, the vision of the Mackenzian observer who continuously finds "the romantic enthusiasm rising within him" in his eccentric journeyings, and who stops at the first place "in which he saw a face he liked."<sup>47</sup> The "editor" of the "bundle of papers" collected under The Man of Feeling complains that "I could never find the author in one strain for two

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<sup>47</sup>Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling (London: T. Cadell, 1771), p. 175; p. 171.

chapters together: and I don't believe there's a single syllogism from beginning to end"<sup>48</sup>--and so might the critic of Pickwick. The only principle to be discerned is that of a miscellany: the variety of life registered in the annals of a tremulous moral sensibility. Whether this is exactly consistent with the narrative of a novel as Dickens conceived it, is debatable. He was to become famous for the serial publication of his novels, but at this stage the Pickwickian sense of life--its spontaneous and improvisational quality--was at least as suitable for another sort of periodical narrative. Its versatility was to be troublesome: both novels and magazines were apparently compatible with Dickens's peculiar qualities but he as yet continued to search for the format which, by its very principle of organization, would positively establish the nature of that narrative genius.

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<sup>48</sup>Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling, p. vii.



## CHAPTER II

### THE IDEA OF A MISCELLANY: BENTLEY'S MISCELLANY AND MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK

Dickens's reputation derives primarily from the work of his novels, yet after David Copperfield he applied great effort to the management of Household Words and All the Year Round among other projects, and seemed no longer to wish to devote himself to novel-writing exclusively. But even if we look back to the start of his writing career we find it a period no less overburdened than his last years, and see a consistent preoccupation with journalism and its relevance to his needs as a novelist. Whatever the success and skill of his novels, it is notable that Dickens repeatedly proposed to divert his energies into journalism and editing. In the end, he became an admirable editor, though the quality of his writing in these efforts compares disappointingly with his fiction. It would seem that it was the novels which absorbed the best aspects of Dickens's organizational talents, and which represent the peculiar way in which his topical concerns, social conscience, and imaginative constructs find their most successful combination and proportions. To understand how this may be so, it is

necessary to look at the proposals for Bentley's Miscellany, Master Humphrey's Clock, The Cricket on the Hearth, and The Daily News; and, concurrently, at the inaugurations of Pickwick, Oliver Twist, and The Old Curiosity Shop.

## i

When Dickens began to write Pickwick for Chapman and Hall at the rate of fourteen pounds monthly for one-and-a-half sheets, he did not give up his steady income (five guineas weekly) as a reporter for the Morning Chronicle, where he had been since August 1833 (the same month in which he had begun to sign "Boz" to his sketches for the Monthly Magazine), nor even after the Pickwick rate had exceeded his newspaper salary, at twenty guineas a month for two sheets. This was also despite the fact that he was to receive from Macrone one hundred and fifty pounds for the first collection and publication, in the same month, February 1836, of Sketches by Boz and a further two hundred pounds for a novel by November 1836, when the payment for Pickwick was also improved. The addition of none of these duties apparently seemed to Dickens reason enough to give up his regular five guineas a week, although in a letter of 1 November 1836 to Chapman and Hall, he acknowledged his increasing inability to produce the Pickwick instalments punctually (PL, I, 188-89).

Further, on 2 November, he agreed to become the editor of Richard Bentley's new magazine, writing that he did so with the intention of giving up his work at

the Morning Chronicle directly (and therefore with the stipulation that Bentley guarantee a year's work), and in the belief that it would not interfere with his work on Pickwick (PL, I, 189-90). On 4 November he signed the official contract with Bentley, and on the 5th, resigned from the Chronicle (PL, I, 190-91). It is incidentally curious about these moves that in Dickens's letter to Chapman and Hall the day before meeting with Bentley, he stated that the worst of his recent tardiness with Pickwick was over, that the sincerity of his resolve on this would be proven to them within the week, and concluded with a flourish: "There--enough of Pickwick, and now for future periodicals" (PL, I, 189). Anticipating an agreement with Bentley, it seems curious that Dickens should have hurried thus into plans with another publisher, and about yet another periodical project. The reassurances to Chapman and Hall must have been based on plans to stop his sketches to the Morning Chronicle--a development that the editorial position at Bentley's would have made possible.

At his own request, the agreement with Bentley stipulated that Dickens's contribution of original work was never to run to more than a sheet. His statement to Bentley that "I need not enlarge on the rapidly increasing value of my time and writings to myself, or on the assistance 'Boz's' name just now, would prove to the circulation" (PL, I, 190) is not only a form of negotiation with Bentley, but perhaps also an indication of the boundaries which he maintained

between the notion of his own creative work (which also happened to be published in a periodical format), and the work performed for an employer's periodical property.

The chance of having his name at the head of a magazine was too good for a young author to refuse, and yet there is an ambivalence at this point in his career, evident in the range of projects accepted, so that it must have been debatable whether "Boz" would come to denote literary excellence or editorial leadership. For although he had stopped the sketches first associated with the name, there was the promise of a second series in a book for Macrone, and other occasional articles for Bentley's magazine.

And the contract of 4 November provided twenty pounds per month for editorial duties, plus twenty guineas per month per sheet of his own writing, thus giving one pound's greater emphasis to his original work--a pound more than Chapman and Hall were paying him for the total of two sheets of Pickwick per month, and seven pounds more per month than the Chronicle had been paying him (thirty-four pounds) or the equivalent of an extra week's salary. Thus he virtually doubled his fee for creative work, making it the more expensive, hence more valuable, commodity, but overall kept the main source of his income supplied by journalistic work.

The history of his tempestuous relations with Bentley is well known: how Dickens and Bentley separately commissioned contributors and articles for the magazine and then clashed in asserting whose projects should have preference. In

reading about these ventures, one gradually sees Dickens's unexpected talent and appetite for administration, but it is also apparent, in this instance, that the notions of Dickens and Bentley about what the best sort of magazine should be were incompatible.

Dickens had greatly approved the change from the title of The Wits' Miscellany, as it was first advertised, to Bentley's Miscellany, as it was subsequently advertised on 1 December 1836 (PL, I, 202; [30 November 1836]). As early as [5 November], the day after the agreement was signed, Dickens had written Bentley, "I think that until we are actually afloat, we had better not be too facetious" (PL, I, 191), and the prospectus which he drafted expressed the sentiment that "a more than ephemeral interest" would accompany the reception of this "feast of the richest comic humour" (PL, I, 682-83). This wish for permanent recognition was supported by the argument that "Some of the most humorous and delightful compositions in the English language, appeared originally in a periodical work, sustained by the wit of the period, and have ever since continued to occupy a conspicuous place, as standard ornaments of our literature" (PL, I, 682); and this would seem to refer to the type of impact which the writing of the eighteenth-century periodical tradition had made on Dickens himself. Otherwise, one would infer from the emphasis of this prospectus on originality and high spirits, that it intended to be the most au courant

of popular publications. Indeed, the very selection of the recently emergent Boz as editor--which Dickens may have seen as encouraging "those who possessing real talent and sterling merit, have yet a name to earn" (PL, I, 683)--rather suggests on Bentley's part a very pragmatic sense of the ephemeral reading market.

Yet, although Dickens was personally ambitious to establish a lasting reputation from this venture, he was heavily pressed by Macrone to finish the Second Series of Sketches by Boz, and it is perhaps not surprising that his first month's contribution to the Miscellany was written in a somewhat similar vein. "The Public Life of Mr. Tulrumbles" in the issue of January 1837 relies on a sketch of the town of Mudfog evoking as much a sense of comfortable familiarity as the sketches in "The Parish." Just as in "The Parish" the characterization (though of stock types) is well done; and the article closes, "Perhaps at some future period, we may venture to open the chronicles of Mudfog."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, in February, what was to become the novel Oliver Twist carries the sub-title of "The Parish Boy's Progress" and begins:

AMONG other public buildings in the town of Mudfog, it boasts of one which is common to most towns great or small, to wit, a workhouse;

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Dickens, "Public Life of Mr. Tulrumbles," Bentley's Miscellany 1 No. 1 (January 1837): 49-63.



and in this workhouse there was born on a day and date which I need not trouble myself to repeat, inasmuch as it can be of no possible consequence to the reader, in this stage of the business at all events: the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter.  
(OT, 1)

Among the Sketches, "Our Parish" had become the one title which recurred, also being, after the initial series of short tales, the particularly fictional element alternating with more factually specific sketches about familiar scenes in London. While it has been noted that sketches such as "The Old Bailey" (Criminal Courts"), "The Pawnbroker's Shop," "The Prisoners' Van," and "The Hospital Patient" contain the factual material that would constitute part of the range of characterization in Oliver Twist (OT, xv-xvi) the format of continuous narration sustained through a serial may have developed with "Our Parish." Certainly, the material had been long studied-- the Sketches are a record of this--and in the first Sketch of the "Parish" series (28 February 1835), he does everything but differentiate the story of one parish boy from among the many at which he hints:

HOW much is conveyed in those two short words--"The Parish!" And with how many tales of distress and misery, of broken fortune and ruined hopes, too often of unrelieved wretchedness and successful knavery, are they associated!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Dickens, Sketches by Boz (1836; London: Chapman and Hall, 1839), p. 3.

The casting-back to a parish situation in the proposed chronicles of *Mudfog* may have served to launch Dickens on his serially extended narrative. When he revised Oliver Twist for book form, he cut the reference to *Mudfog* which had provided some continuity between the January issue of the Miscellany, and the serial's first instalment in February. Even so the confusion about Oliver's exact date of birth did not disguise the great topical relevance of the story, and had the whole piece stopped after the first few chapters, it might have satisfied as a satirical parable of the bureaucracy of public charity. Considering its seriousness of purpose, which Dickens indicated in later prefaces to the novel, and its contemporary reputation as dangerously "low," one wonders at how, apart from the facetiousness used to satirize the Poor Law parish officials, the story made its way into a "Wits" Miscellany, particularly one published by the conservative Bentley. Certainly Dickens reverted to the lighter tone whenever in subsequent issues he underwrote the Oliver instalment and had to include additional articles: "The Pantomime of Life" in March 1837; "Some Particulars concerning a Lion" in May 1837; and "*Mudfog*" papers in October 1837, when there was no Oliver instalment after disagreements with Bentley.

Like the first article about Mr. Tulrumbles, these "stray chapters" are distinctly uninspired in atmosphere, and when Dickens was trying to free himself of obligations to Bentley a few years later, he let them go to the publisher with very little remark. In "The Pantomime of

Life," Dickens pushes merely humorous observations into satirically persuasive statements about the society presented. The description of a stage pantaloon as he appears in various entertainments is drawn out, not for its own sake, but to lead to the conceit that this exotic stage creature is even to be found on the ordinary street and is, in fact, a rather selfish and debauched character. Speaking about the general fraud practised on ordinary men, Boz reflects that "the commencement of a session of Parliament is neither more nor less than the drawing up of the curtain for a grand comic pantomime," and he launches into a facetious description of how a Parliamentary "clown" disposes himself in various antics under the

wand of office, which his leader of harlequin holds above his head. Acted upon by this wonderful charm he will become perfectly motionless, moving neither hand, foot, nor finger, and will even lose the faculty of speech at an instant's notice; or, on the other hand, he will become all life and animation if required, pouring forth a torrent of words without sense or meaning, throwing himself into the wildest and most fantastic contortions, and even grovelling in the earth and licking up the dust.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty years later, in Household Words, Dickens was still writing this sort of facetiously fanciful prose--think of "The Toady Tree" (1853) or "Legal and Equitable Jokes" (1854)--to convince his readers of their position as mere "supernumeraries"<sup>4</sup> in their own society. In this "wit,"

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Dickens, "The Pantomime of Life," Bentley's Miscellany 1 No. 3 (March 1837): 296; 296-97.

<sup>4</sup>Dickens, "Pantomime of Life": 295.

Dickens in fact becomes quite unamusing in his single-mindedness, and his prose, forgettable. His satirical digressions are not diversions any more, and it is impossible to become involved in this insincerely recreative and thesis-ridden fictional writing, as we do in the expansive play of the novels. There is no room in these "stray chapters," as there was in the continuation of the chapters of Oliver, for indulgence in a story, and it is as if Dickens was only too aware of this fact when working up such pieces.

One wonders precisely how the difference in length might be partly responsible for this result. It is not as if Dickens does not pursue an idea single-mindedly enough in these pieces--and, in fact, in a novel, changes of direction and subject could be much more frequent. But these changes of pace and situation in the novel are perhaps part of the reader's sense that the author is feeling out his way quite as freshly and enjoyably as himself, whereas, in the shorter articles, the thesis is apparent before the word is written down, and only remains flatly to be followed out, with little likelihood of knowing much more about it by the end.

Further such chapters simply demonstrate the same technique of playing on words so that they yield a didactic point, as for example, in "Some Particulars Concerning a Lion," the zoological term provides the "wit" for satirizing social bores and the society which

reveres them. In the case of the "Full Report of the Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything" (October 1837), the reversion to Mudfog may have occurred because, having suspended writing of Oliver during editorial disputes with Bentley, Dickens needed a plausible substitute for the novel, of which Mudfog had been the original setting, while still withholding the attraction of the serial from Bentley's magazine. Dickens speaks of this piece to Cruikshank, as being "the best I can make it of it's [sic] kind" (PL, I, 301), and it evidently continued Dickens's satire on the meetings of the British Association (PL, I, 427n). Not only the subject, but the manner also, was traditional; Dickens could have seen this format long ago in Samuel Johnson's Idler (No. 33, "Journal of a Senior Fellow" or "Genuine Idler") and the Spectator (Nos. 7, 67, 317), among others--where the elaborateness of the record highlights the fact that nothing is being said.

This is, of course, the same expedient as he had taken in the first chapter of Pickwick. In falling back on these clichés of satirical journalism, Dickens was, in fact, reverting to the tone of a "Wits' Miscellany"--an aloof tone and approach which effectively suspended not only the progress of Oliver, but also the deepening attachment of the reader to Dickens's own narrative voice. It is the mark of Dickens's transition from journalism to novel-writing that in the account of Oliver, as in those of Pickwick and Nicholas Nickleby, he found a satirical stance which



unexpectedly also invokes the reader's sympathy. The parish boy turns out not to be part of the satire, but rather, the unifying basis for the satirical perspective. The reader is willingly carried along over a wide range of topics because the narrative setting in which they appear endows the whole with a reassuring emotional progress. The narrative is thus persuasive in a far more comprehensive sense about social injustice than any journalistic rhetoric could be.

This difference need not have come about because Dickens suddenly became more organized--it is clear that his overburdened schedule kept all his writing on an improvisational basis. Instead, it seems that the "idea" of Oliver, and the expansion of it allowed by serial instalments, turned out to be peculiarly conducive to the expression of his own gifts as a social commentator. And the fact of its becoming a novel by contract was important in confirming Dickens's investment of his emotional and technical resources in it. Among other things, it meant that the narrative was not going to stop simply when topical concerns had been covered: there not only had to be an end made, but also, throughout, an ending sensed.

However, Dickens seemed repeatedly, if perhaps unwittingly, to set for himself the difficulty of writing fiction which would be teleologically as well as serially organized. On the same day as Chapman and Hall celebrated



the conclusion of Pickwick, they also contracted for "a new work, the title whereof shall be fixed upon and determined by him of a similar character and of the same extent and contents in point of quantity as the said work entitled 'The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club'" (PL, I, 659), to begin publication on 31 March 1838.

Thus the formulaic nature and length of what was to become Nicholas Nickleby were settled before the characters or subject; and once again, with a three-volume novel promised first to Macrone and now to Bentley (Barnaby Rudge) still hanging over his head, Dickens was allowing his workload to be dictated by publishers' commissions rather than personal inspiration. The publication of the new periodical work ran concurrently with that of Bentley's Miscellany, once he had finished other projects also given by these same two publishers, the editing of Memoirs of Grimaldi for Bentley, and the anonymous Sketches of Young Gentlemen for Chapman and Hall. He is also known to have contemplated undertaking with Ainsworth a periodical entitled "The Lions of London," which was abandoned (PL, I, 358n). When the two minor projects were completed, he began on Nicholas Nickleby in February 1838, having done his research in Yorkshire the previous month.

In fact, by the end of the fourth number, the Yorkshire scenes are finished, and Nicholas is back in London once more looking for a vocation. There is a further bit of satire when he applies to become secretary to a member

of Parliament (Chapter Sixteen) in which Dickens makes perhaps his most trenchant hit so far at the vanity and hypocrisy which he always saw in things Parliamentary. Nicholas eventually becomes a tutor to the Kenwigs children instead, and then an actor in Mr. Crummles' company. During this comic interlude Dickens concentrated on finishing Oliver Twist, and by October 1838 he was free to take a short trip, during which he visited some Manchester factories and observed the conditions of the workers. On his return, he wrote to Edward Marlborough Fitzgerald, "I mean to strike the heaviest blow in my power for those unfortunate creatures, but whether I shall do so in the 'Nickleby', or wait some other opportunity, I have not yet determined" (PL, I, 484; 29 December 1838). In the number for February 1839, the Cheeryble brothers appeared and Nicholas takes a position in their warehouse. Also, in November 1838, came news that the novel itself was being professionally adapted to the stage not even halfway through its publication, and Dickens moved to strike a blow for his own livelihood, by having Nicholas deliver a broadside against "a literary gentleman," "who had dramatised in his time two hundred and forty-seven novels as fast as they had come out--some of them faster than they had come out"(NN, 477).

In noting this succession of topics on which Dickens felt it necessary to comment as they caught his attention, one must reaffirm Sylvère Monod's statement that "This has nothing to do with what is known as the roman

à thèse."<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Nickleby is not generically or palpably shaped as a whole by any didacticism about Yorkshire schools or anything else. It is barely even held together by any clear-cut preoccupation of the hero. The most obvious thing about Nicholas is his general disgust at hypocrisy of any sort and good-hearted interest in the down-trodden of this life--qualities always prominent in his author's life.

When one looks ahead to any of the programmes which Dickens expounded for his journals, one sees how congenial a figurehead or persona Nicholas Nickleby would have made: his picaresque adaptability to any number of settings and encounters makes him as transparent a medium for commentary as Esther Summerson would later become. But his advantage over any "Uncommercial Traveller," and one of the features which must have made him more popular than his successor Master Humphrey, was the fact that, along with a susceptibility to varied topical adventures, the narrative of his career sustained a steadily deepening romantic interest, a progress in which romantic fantasies were allowed to take hold and be played out. The reader knows that the social ailments of society must continue to vex indefinitely; but the satisfactory conclusion of the love story is what resolves the novel, and the movement

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<sup>6</sup>Sylvère Monod, Dickens the Novelist (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 154.

towards this resolution lends overall significance and persuasiveness to episodes in which the topical rhetoric is not sufficiently compelling.

## ii

"Our Lucubrations," the famous substance of Richard Steele's Tatler, and the phrase used by Dickens in "The Pantomime of Life"<sup>7</sup> to denote his work there, would seem to typify the difference between Richard Bentley's conception of a Miscellany and one Dickens would truly call his own. Instead of a summer-day's wit, he preferred the leisure and dignity of observations made in the glow of an evening fireside. In the original preface to Nicholas Nickleby, which finished serialization in September 1839, Dickens had addressed his readers in terms far warmer than those of the prefaces to the Sketches or Pickwick, which had concentrated more on making a show of authorial competence. Where the other prefaces cited all the most literary precedents and insisted on the thoroughness of his characterizations, the preface to Nicholas Nickleby renounces "Horace's rule, of keeping his book nine years in his study" and, instead, speaks of himself as "The author of a periodical performance" and "the periodical essayist." Significantly, he ascribes to the periodical writer very specific qualities:

"The author of a periodical performance," says Mackenzie, "has indeed a claim to the attention and regard of his readers, more

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<sup>7</sup>Dickens, "Pantomime of Life": 296.

interesting than that of any other writer. ...But the periodical essayist commits to his readers the feelings of the day, in the language which those feelings have prompted. As he has delivered himself with the freedom of intimacy and the cordiality of friendship, he will naturally look for the indulgence which those relations may claim; and when he bids his readers adieu, will hope, as well as feel, the regrets of an acquaintance, and the tenderness of a friend.  
(NN, ix-x)

This was obviously less of a preface to a novel than a pitch to set the tone of his presentation of himself in the upcoming Master Humphrey's Clock, then going forward in plans with Chapman and Hall.

In his substantial outline of the proposed magazine, enclosed in a letter of [14 July 1839] to Forster on the eve of an approaching period of negotiations with Chapman and Hall about his literary property, Dickens invokes The Tatler and The Spectator, and one thinks of a small boy sitting on his bed at twilight, "reading as if for life" these books from another era. These dreams eventually led to the image of Master Humphrey whiling away the night hours from ten to two with stories and reminiscences. The conception of Humphrey as a solitary but observant man also recaptures another habit of Dickens's early life, when as a young adolescent he wandered homeless round London, fascinated in spite of his loneliness by the street incidents he witnessed.

Completely unlike the faddish Bentley's, Dickens was not apprehensive about reverting to a format of the previous century, and seemed to feel that the cultivation of an eidolon personality would be as attractive to readers



of the 1840s as it was to those of the eighteenth century or an unworldly small boy twenty years earlier. We may summarize something of what the boy had responded to and the hopeful editor must have remembered when he thought of Master Humphrey. The name of Isaac Bickerstaff had preceded that of the Tatler and helped to draw attention to its incorporation, but the paper had substantiated his personality and deepened the attraction. Although solitary, an old bachelor disappointed long ago in love, he obviously likes people, watching them talk and meet in the various coffee- and chocolate-houses which make up his news headings. Nonetheless, he generally indulges a personal streak of whimsicality and also sets aside a heading outside the domains of politics, fashion and the arts, "From My Own Apartment." He thus combines a personal eccentric attractiveness with an unforced curiosity about others. In the last Tatler or Bickerstaff paper, Steele, finally writing in his own name, stated that he had been speaking "in the Character of an old Man, a Philosopher, a Humorist, an Astrologer, and a Censor." The last, though it may sound severe, was sincerely intended, and it was perhaps the especial talent of the Tatler papers to carry out such a function so successfully; the approach being, as Steele also admitted in this last paper, "to allure my Reader with the Variety of my Subjects, and insinuate, if I could, the Weight of Reason with the Agreeableness of Wit." This of course he did, in some of the most appealing prose written in English. The length of the numbers moved



from being organized in the departmental sections of three-to-eight-hundred words each, to single papers of fourteen hundred words, suggesting that Steele discovered that length was congenial, rather than burdensome, to these purposes. Within the length of one essay might be included exemplary tales and allusions, reported dialogue, and "correspondence."

As well as these casual correspondents, other characters appeared as authors of several papers, and these contributions soon acquired a distinctive tone and place. The writings and matrimonial adventures of Jenny Distaff, the sister of Bickerstaff, soon became valuable inclusions; and, in the light of later developments, we may wonder that the "club" of Bickerstaff's friends, introduced in No. 132, did not become a regular feature also. Certainly Bickerstaff seems to set them up as being an habit with him, meeting from six every evening till ten at the same fireside for many years; and he emphasizes in his description of their intercourse the philosophical pleasure which old men derive from discursive recital of events and observations. There is definitely a mood over this whole number of almost elegaic tranquility:

Their Conversation is a kind of Preparative for Sleep: It takes the Mind down from its Abstractions, leads it into the familiar Traces of Thought, and lulls it into that State of Tranquillity which is the Condition<sup>8</sup> of a thinking Man when he is but half Awake.

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<sup>8</sup>Richard Steele, The Tatler No. 132 (11 February 1709).

Very unlike what Dickens was to do, Bickerstaff does not flatter or sentimentalize the group of old worthies, and in fact, their conversation is made out to be repetitious and dull, fit only for the hours before bed--therefore accounting, perhaps, for the absence of further appearances. Bickerstaff's own thoughts and activities in his daytime rounds are felt to be more truly valuable as entertainment and philosophy.

All these aspects of an eidolon figure, which Steele learned in writing the Tatler, were revived when he collaborated more closely with Addison in The Spectator. Steele did not extend the conceit of No. 132; but Addison, writing the first number of its successor, makes a definite commitment to this format, only changing the personalities somewhat. In No. 132 of the Tatler Bickerstaff preens himself on being the wit of the old men's group; but Mr. Spectator is said to live his days in silence, even sullenness, though known by others for his learning. Again, like the Tatler, he easily frequents the various public houses of refreshment. But the difference is that the Spectator speaks publically only within his own Club: "Thus I live in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species."<sup>9</sup> There are no headings derived from the public houses, and it may be noted with reference to Master Humphrey, that even

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<sup>9</sup>The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. I, p. 4.

although Mr. Spectator is eager finally to communicate his thoughts to his contemporaries for philanthropic reasons, he refuses to reveal his age or address, and cultivates obscurity.

Steele's tastes perhaps show up in the description of the Spectator's club and in the prominence of Sir Roger de Coverley, who exhibits the temperament of the hearty country gentleman, benevolent and comfortably old-fashioned; as with portrayals of this type by Sterne and Goldsmith, his eccentricities proceed from an inherent unworldliness. Perhaps the most striking feature of his description is how much more lively and appealing Steele has made this second depiction of an intimate group--like the first, excepting Sir Roger they turn out to make little impact on the periodical as a whole, but one is still surprised by the apparently enthusiastic revival of an idea which seemed so unpersuasive earlier in the Tatler.

Such are some of the associations and roots in literary history of Master Humphrey's Clock. When Dickens explains what he sees as the resemblances between the Spectator and his proposed magazine, he refers to this introductory fiction of a small club, the history and transactions of which will be a motif in his paper, and we may note the similarities between the clubs of Mr. Spectator and Master Humphrey. Dickens has the indulgence of greater length, making his description of the club rather more a narrative of how he first became acquainted with these people:

how he met the deaf gentleman in a tavern on Christmas Day; and later, Jack Redburn, the man "of that easy, wayward, truant class whom the world is accustomed to designate as nobody's enemies but their own." This character, who becomes a steward to Master Humphrey, is said to have been "reared in the expectation of a fortune he has never inherited" because he was "too indolent to court, and too honest to flatter."<sup>10</sup> Nothing in the Spectator, except perhaps the false bluffness of Captain Sentry or the disappointments of position in the clergyman's life, suggests to one quite the degree of mournfulness with which Dickens invests these characters. The fourth member of the group (there are six chairs set aside, leaving the possibility open for additional members) is a formerly energetic man of business, Owen Miles, who, perhaps in the vein of Sir Andrew Freeport, has retired from the world upon the loss of his wife.

In the emphasis upon the age and retiring tendencies of its characters, Master Humphrey's Club resembles the dullness rather of Bickerstaff's, than Mr. Spectator's, group, and the hours from ten to two push their lucubrations virtually into the realm of sleep, not just post-prandial relaxation, and the placid routine of the day into the

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Dickens, Master Humphrey's Clock (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840), I, 30. All future pages references to this work will be incorporated in my text, preceded by "MHC" and enclosed in parentheses. See also, Charles Dickens, Master Humphrey's Clock (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 39. Page references to this text will follow the above references.

frenzied activity of the dream-world. Master Humphrey is eccentric to a degree verging on the repellant: he is set apart by a deformed figure and the memory of an old disappointment. If allowing few to come close to him, he still remains interested in the world at large. His ruling passion is one of sentiment, benevolent feeling for his fellow man, especially in secret suffering--and all his fireside companions obviously reflect this condition. As with the vision of Wordsworth, all splendour resides in the past, and present pleasures derive from memory. Warm-hearted, gentle, Master Humphrey may be--and Dickens probably emphasized these qualities in order to attract the reader who would feel uncomfortable with the glancing wit of Bentley's--but surely Steele was intuitively correct in leaving the peculiar pleasures of old men to themselves, and in merely summarizing their dullness.

Yet Dickens must have realized that much of his talent lay in the observation of topicalities, and he proposed that his paper should have greater novelty and a more popular tone than his eighteenth-century models. To this end he thought of yet another serial feature for his paper: travels

either to Ireland or to America, and to write from thence a series of papers descriptive of the places and people I see, introducing local tales, traditions, and legends, something after the plan of Washington Irving's Alhambra. I should wish the republication of these papers in a separate form, with others to render the subject complete (if we should deem it advisable), to form part of the arrangement for the work; and I should wish the same provision to be made for the republication of the Gog and Magog series, or indeed any that I undertook.  
(PL, I, 564-65; 14 July 1839)



The Gog and Magog series had its precedents also and was to feature:

stories and descriptions of London as it was many years ago, as it is now, and as it will be many years hence, to which I would give some such title as The Relaxations of Gog and Magog, dividing them into portions like the Arabian Nights, and supposing Gog and Magog to entertain each other with such narrations in Guildhall all night long, and to break off every morning at daylight. An almost inexhaustible field of fun, raillery, and interest, would be laid upon by pursuing this idea.

(PL, I, 564; [14 July 1839])

Here we see how one of Dickens's favourite bodies of literature--one which is the essence of episodically cumulative length--helped him to formulate a serial mode of interest.

Thus the recitals of Gog and Magog were shaped to supply a "fanciful" department of the magazine, a stream of imaginative writing that Dickens saw as easier to produce than the continuous narratives with which he had been occupied so far, or the novel which he had not yet managed to write in one sustained effort. This strategy was also very suitable for a department of commentary on the affairs of the real world, which would be no less literary in its aspirations:

a series of satirical papers purporting to be translated from some Savage Chronicles, and to describe the administration of justice in some country that never existed, and record the proceedings of its wise men. The object of this series (which if I can compare it with anything would be something between Gulliver's Travels and the Citizen of the World) would be to keep a special look-out upon the magistrates in town and country, and never to leave those worthies alone.

(PL, I, 564; [14 July 1839])



Typically, the didacticism is to be made palatable by an exotically removed setting. The alternate title of Citizen of the World, which was written by Oliver Goldsmith during the years 1760-61, was "Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to his Friends in the East," and the "Chinese" observer of course describes all that he sees in an elaborate and innovative way. Dickens never got around to writing such papers, but to any reader of Household Words or All the Year Round, the similarities to Goldsmith in choice of topics is notable: the degeneracy of the English nobility, particularly in their tendency to exchange many pounds and cringes for "two yards of blue ribbon"<sup>11</sup> from an ingeniously frugal monarch, or a visit to the Courts symbolically substituted for a visit to Bedlam.<sup>12</sup> Reading such passages one feels the continuities between Goldsmith and Dickens, not only in topics, but also in satirical manner or, rather, mannerism. One notes that the usual format of the Letters is to describe in ironic terms the custom singled out by the Chinaman till a pitch is reached in the final paragraph where an aphorism or fable by the philosopher neatly makes Goldsmith's polemical point. Neither Goldsmith nor Dickens achieved the graceful amplitude of the Spectator in this venue. Goldsmith had attempted a less satirical manner in his periodical The Bee,

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<sup>11</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, Citizen of the World 64 (6 August 1760), Collected Works, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), II, 265.

<sup>12</sup> Goldsmith, Citizen of the World 93 (28 November 1760), Collected Works, II, 390-93.

also mentioned by Dickens in the letter quoted above, which consisted rather nondescriptly of general essays, short fables, and lively comment on topical doings; but it was sustained for only eight issues, from October to November 1759.

A final eighteenth-century model was that of Samuel Johnson's Idler, which ran from 15 April 1758 to 5 April 1760; this was cited by Forster in that list of Dickens's early reading where the Tatler, Spectator, and Citizen of the World also appeared.<sup>13</sup> Here again the periodical writer strives for an easy tone when soliciting readers:

Scarcely any name can be imagined from which less envy or competition is to be dreaded. The Idler has no rivals or enemies. The man of business forgets him; the man of enterprize despises him; and though such as tread the same track of life, fall commonly into jealousy and discord, Idlers are always found to associate in peace, and he who is most famed for doing nothing, is glad to meet another as idle as himself.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this Humphreyish sounding address, the Idler was at first untypical of Johnson in its topicality and attempt to emulate the lightness of the Spectator, but after the first twenty numbers the characteristic Johnsonian preoccupations reasserted themselves; and when reading even this casually

<sup>13</sup>John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, ed. J.W.T. Ley (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), Bk. 1, Chp. 1, p. 8). All future page references to this work will be incorporated in my text with the appropriate section and chapter numbers preceded by "Forster" and enclosed in parentheses.

<sup>14</sup>Samuel Johnson, The Idler No. 1 (15 April 1753), The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. W.J. Bate et al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), II, 4.

projected work, we realize that it is the ability to sustain mood and depth of insight, instead of flitting over a number of verbal conceits--the hold on a subject which is thought of, indeed, as essentially "Johnsonian"--which one misses in Goldsmith, and in Dickens when he attempts the same ephemeral format. Perhaps the significant fact is that both authors came nearer to such an achievement in their novel-writing.

Actually, however deliberately Dickens may have intended Master Humphrey's Club to recall Mr. Spectator's, he has come closer to that of Mr. Bickerstaff; and it is another periodical publication--"THE PICKWICK CLUB, so renowned in the annals of Huggin-lane, and so closely entwined with the thousand interesting associations connected with Lothbury and Cateaton-street"<sup>15</sup>--which more nearly approximates the attractive spirit of the Spectator model. And in the case of both Pickwick and Master Humphrey's Clock, the "miscellaneous collection of tales, anecdotes, etc., collected and arranged by Boz" eventually gave way to the organizational demands of a novel--and thus, a different principle of length.

### iii

The miscellany eidolon becomes more fertile as a novelistic character, this transformation being typified by the nostalgic old man of Master Humphrey's Clock yielding

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<sup>15</sup>Dickens, Pickwick Papers, ed. Robert L. Patten (1972), Appendix A., p. 899.

to the young orphan child of The Old Curiosity Shop and her dream-like confrontations with the world. What are seen by an old man as the minutely observed eccentricities and the manners of the workaday world are, to a child, the bewildering irrationalities of adults--and because inherent in this format is the child's peculiar sensitivity to power, the irrationalities amusing to a philosophic old man and the adult reader become laden with the tension and significance of a sustained critical vision of society, often constructed as a story about becoming an adult. One recalls George Orwell's remark about the Murdstones in David Copperfield and how they hold, simultaneously, the potential of terror for the child reader and satire for the adult reader--two contrasting but coeval perceptions of these characters. The key difference is that the adult perceives immediately what the child formulates only after a series of encounters; and the differences in their descriptions of what is seen will be the difference between fable and fiction: between a symbolic illustration whose final intention is continuously self-evident at every stage, and a narrative which begins in order to discover its ending, and cannot discriminate between its purposeful and contingent elements.

In fact, the very first story which opens Master Humphrey's canon exemplifies precisely the mix of romantic and censorious elements inherent in Dickens's scheme. "Introduction to the Giant Chronicles" eventually culminates in the tale of a sixteenth-century apprentice, later prominent burgher, Hugh Graham, who dies both in the defence of his city and

in revenge against the upper-class cad, who, twenty years earlier, had seduced the fair daughter of young Hugh's master and the true love of Hugh's life. This faithful love is rewarded by the reunion of the lovers even if in death, and the virtues of the middle class shown triumphant over the treacheries of the pampered upper classes. The political overtones of this rather perfunctory love story of nine pages are perhaps defused by the historical setting which seems intended to supply an exotic dimension, but Dickens does not shy from reinforcing his didacticism in its framing story, and in the inclusion also of "Correspondence," from a swell who shows only ignorance and insolence in proposing his own election to Master Humphrey's club.

The story which introduces the "Giant Chronicles" framework consists of the illustration of how a simple old gentleman, Joe Toddyhigh, is snubbed by his former school chum a wholesale fruiterer and jumped-up Lord Mayor of London--again, petty snobbery is contrasted unfavourably with sentimental loyalty to the pure aspirations of youth. Joe Toddyhigh is invited to witness the Lord Mayor's banquet, but he wanders away, and falls sleepily into a vision of one of the "Nights" of the Guildhall Giants, Gog and Magog, where these two figureheads of London have made a compact every night from midnight to dawn, to "entertain each other with stories of our past experience; with tales of the past, the present, and the future; with legends of London and her sturdy citizens from the old



simple times" (MHC, I, 14;p.20)--the aforementioned vindication of Hugh Graham. Thus Toddyhigh--in a format rather redundantly echoing that of the periodical as a whole--forgets the snubs of his own world, in a fantasy which obligingly awards retribution to the underdog. All such feats of the imagination might have been dismissed as harmless, but Dickens still uses the convenience of fantasy again and again to rework the failures of the real world--through fantasy he can persuade his readers of a more satisfying world order.

Clearly the extended tale of the beautiful and sensitive girl making her way among grotesque figures and scenes has the advantage of greater length in which to work its persuasion. The old schoolmaster under whose care Nell spends her last days, listens to her adventures and inwardly exclaims, in a spirit which belongs to the sentimental tradition of the "Man of Feeling" and of Wordsworth:

"This child!" he thought--"Has this child heroically persevered under all doubts and dangers, struggled with poverty and suffering, upheld and sustained by strong affection and the consciousness of rectitude alone! And yet the world is full of such heroism. Have I yet to learn that the hardest and best-borne trials are those which are never chronicled in any earthly record, and are suffered every day! And should I be surprised to hear the story of this child!"<sup>16</sup>

The account he has heard is the novel the reader holds, and such is the response Dickens obviously hoped to induce.

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<sup>16</sup>Dickens, Master Humphrey's Clock (1840), II, 53. See also Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (1841; London: Oxford University Press, 1951; rpt. 1965), p. 344.



Master Humphrey is explained to be the "single gentleman" who afterwards spends his days retracing Nell's wanderings in order to reproduce it emotionally for himself also. This includes not only the paths of Nell herself but also the stories of people whose lives are cut across by her own.

Of course, this is no more than the general principle by which Master Humphrey's Clock was originally supposed to proceed when amassing its tales. However, it was only when the miscellany was revised as a continuous tale that Master Humphrey is said to muse about Nell:

"It would be a curious speculation," said I, after some restless turns across and across the room, "to imagine her in her future life, holding her solitary way among a crowd of wild grotesque companions; the only pure, fresh, youthful object in the throng."<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, once the decision to organize the Clock differently had been made, the most notable change was the disappearance of Master Humphrey himself. His essential characteristics, however, are recognizable in the single gentleman, the Bachelor, and the schoolmaster, and the realization of the significance of Nell's story is shared among these men --although the actual essence of its meaning is conveyed throughout the book by an unpersonified narrator, not by any of their tellings, which are only assumed or summarized.

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<sup>17</sup>Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop, p. 20. This paragraph does not appear in Master Humphrey's Clock, but only on the additional page marked "47-79" which is found in the single volume reprinting of The Old Curiosity Shop from stereotype plates of Master Humphrey's Clock. There is no publishing date given in this volume, but see "Advertisement" found in the front.

The end of Master Humphrey and the first person voice meant, in fact, that the range and variety of scenes could be much greater. This did not mean any greater dissipation of effect. Dickens had taken on the idea of Master Humphrey partly in order to avoid the exertion of continuous plot constructions, in the hope that the unity lent by the subsuming identity of a single narrator would give another type of coherence of the variety of topics brought to the notice of the reader. But his artistic error was in constructing a narrator whose character was unequal to his own narrative talents: as he was gradually to discover, the eidolon of "Charles Dickens" carried its own very recognizable identity, emphasis, and most importantly, attraction. All that caught his notice--the very breadth of his attention--coalesces in the keenness of a "Man of Feeling," and the very immediacy of his sympathies and fears provides its own consistency of tone and style. As well as this, continuity is provided in working out the speculations attached to these passing phenomena through the progress of a central fantasy. Similarly, in Bentley's Miscellany, the one sheet of "original matter," initially the Mudfog papers, had been superseded by a "Progress."

This goes far beyond the interest of the reporter; by coming under comment, the public scene has become personal, and in coming under a personal judgement it may also become part of an idea developed by the commentator. Thus far in Dickens's experience it seemed that only fiction, periodically published, could begin to handle

this potent personal translation of public life successfully.

## iv

A combination of circumstances in the five hectic years between 1836 and 1841 had determined that Dickens's two attempts so far to establish a place for himself as an editor had ended in the writing of a continuous periodical narrative. Yet, despite his evident desire to be a commentator on his society, during the serialisation of Barnaby Rudge he refused both nomination as a Parliamentary candidate for the Liberal party (PL, II, 288; to George Lovejoy, 31 May 1841); and the editorship of the New Monthly after Theodore Hook's death (PL, II, 372; to William Shoberl, 29 August 1841). In declining the latter, he simply wrote, "My experience of Magazine editing, however, has been by no means a pleasant one, and I have resolved not to connect myself, even in name, with such duties any more."

Of course, money alone would have made both these proposals unfeasible, and on 21 August 1841 Dickens and Chapman and Hall had already worked out an agreement by which he should have the coming year free of writing engagements. This was negotiated on the basis that it was in the interests of both publishers and author to protect the commercial property of his name, and from this, one gains some notion of what Dickens planned for his future as a writer. The precipitate reversion to the popular monthly parts now seemed "hazardous":

I remembered that Scott failed in the sale of his very best works, and never recovered his

old circulation (though he wrote fifty times better than at first) because he never left off. I thought how I had spoilt the novel sale--in the cases of Bulwer, Marryatt [sic], and the best people--by my great success, and how my great success was, in a manner, spoiling itself, by being run to death and deluging the town with every description of trash and rot. Then I thought if I could but have foreseen what would come to pass, and could but have made better bargains, now was the time--the very moment, with a view to my future fame and station--to stop--to write no more, not one word, for a whole year--and then to come out with a complete story in three volumes--with no cuts or any expense but that of printing --and put the town in a blaze again.  
(PL, II, 365; to Thomas Mitton, 23 August 1841)

The ambition to be recognized as a novelist here reasserted its priority in Dickens's mind. At this point the writing of three volumes seemed a fresher, more impressive enterprise than the steady slog of periodical publication.

And yet, a week later, in the letter in which Dickens told Mitton of his refusal of the New Monthly editorship, he wrote also of the decision to ensure that his holiday would last fully a year by "the breaking ground then, with a new work in monthly parts instead of a Novel (which gives me, of course, a much longer rest)" (PL, II, 372; 30 August [1841]). However, this argument, too, is further confused by the fact that Dickens did not use the whole of the year's time to ponder the strategy of Martin Chuzzlewit. American Notes was energetically completed in the time from July to October 1842. It certainly "put the town in a blaze" and yet, far from being a three-volume masterwork, is an improvisation out of Dickens's letters from America, and was as spontaneous and topical as any journalism he had done. And when the sales of Martin Chuzzlewit flagged after

the fifth number, American travels were worked into the narrative quite as unapologetically as if the novel had indeed been another form of the Clock. Dickens's association with America was still controversial, however personally weary he might have been of it; Forster writes that the need to revive flagging sales influenced Dickens "less than the challenge to make good his Notes which every mail had been bringing him from unsparing assailants beyond the Atlantic" (Forster, Bk. 4, Chp. 2, p. 302). If anything, this explanation tends to give Dickens's methods still more of a journalistic flavour, as if he had been an editor seeking to make use of correspondents' contributions.

Moreover, upon his return to England, as well as American Notes, another editorial project had presented itself, and Dickens's enthusiasm at this possibility also shows how strongly the drive to be a political commentator had been revived by America. A Whig newspaper, the Courier, had lapsed during his absence, and Dickens was moved to investigate how much support the Liberal party would be likely to give its revival, with himself as editor:

I need scarcely say, that if I threw my small person into the breach, and wrote for the paper (literary articles as well as political) I could command immediate attention; while the influence I have with Booksellers and Authors would give me a better chance of stamping it with a new character, and securing for it, after a reasonable trial, good advertisements, than almost any other man could possess.

(PL, II, 262-63; to Lady Holland, 8 July 1842)

When these overtures proved fruitless, he was careful to disclaim that there had been any thought of personal



advantage, and contented himself with hinting at what the party had ignored:

The notion of this newspaper was bred in me by my old training--I was as well acquainted with the management of one, some years ago as an Engineer is, with the Steam engine. And I always feel when I take up a paper now (which is not often) that the subjects which all the writers leave unhandled (except Fonblanque, who is another Swift) are exactly the questions which interest the people, and concern their business and bosoms, most.  
(PL, ii, 265-66; to Lady Holland, 11 July 1842)

The careful novelist was again yielding to the concerned observer and campaigner.

Yet when Chuzzlewit failed to make an impact and publishers seemed to be losing confidence in him, Dickens began to feel too drained even to consider a new magazine, let alone another novel; and his mental refuge from fears of writing himself out while continuing to sink in public esteem was to take off this time for Europe, where he could safely confine himself to the writing of travel letters:

I am afraid of a magazine--just now. I don't think the time a good one, or the chances favourable. I am afraid of putting myself before the town as writing tooth and nail for bread, headlong, after the close of a book taking so much out of one as Chuzzlewit. I am afraid I could not do it, with justice to myself. I know that whatever we may say at first, a new magazine, or anything, would require so much propping that I should be forced (as in the Clock) to put myself into it, in my old shape.

(PL, III, 587; to John Forster, 1 November 1843)

He had recently written some letters on controversial subjects (which, in their length and comprehensiveness, are more like articles than letters), in his old paper,



the Morning Chronicle,<sup>18</sup> but upon inquiry he discovered that the Chronicle was not willing to pay him regularly the amount of money his name was now worth, so there was to be no going back in time; he had to be content with writing for that paper, if at all, on a free-lance basis with payment accordingly. In the conference which Dickens held with Bradbury and Evans and Forster, to decide (negatively) on the merits of such a commission, "lay the germ of another newspaper enterprise he permitted himself to engage in twelve months later, to which he would have done more wisely to have also answered No" (Forster, Bk. 4, Chp. 3, p. 325).

However, Dickens obviously did not forget or think differently about the letter written to Bradbury and Evans a month before his departure, which contracts, among other projects, for the editing of a journal beginning within six months after Dickens's return from the year's retirement (PL, IV, 121-23). In the letter which Forster cites as the first after the return from Europe, Dickens wrote:

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<sup>18</sup>J.W.T. Ley, ed. Forster, Life of Charles Dickens (p. 238, fn. 268) remarked that these letters had not been identified but were thought to have been on the subject of slavery. Since then, identification has been made of: a letter on the Mines and Collieries Bill restricting the employment of women and children in mines (PL, III, 278-85; 25 July 1842); and a satirical review which appeared on 20 October 1842, of Lord Londonderry's "Letter to Lord Ashley, M.P., on the Mines and Collieries" (see PL, III, 351-52; reprinted in Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 18 (1934): 177-96. A letter of 29 November 1842, on the Prince Consort's presidency of the Sanatorium, Devonshire House, and describing the services by this institution, also seems to be partly of Dickens's composition (PL, III, 384).

I really think I have an idea, and not a bad one, for the periodical. I have turned it over, the last two days, very much in my mind; and think it positively good. I incline still to weekly; price three halfpence, if possible; partly original partly select; notices of books, notices of theatres, notices of all good things, notices of all bad ones; Carol philosophy, cheerful views, sharp anatomization of humbug, jolly good temper; papers always in season, pat to the time of year; and a vein of glowing, hearty, generous, mirthful, beaming reference in everything to Home and Fireside.  
(PL, IV, 327-28; [Early July 1845])

As with Master Humphrey's Clock, one notes the conjunction of polemical topicality ("sharp anatomization of humbug") and sentimentalizing spirit. However, this time there is no fictional eidolon, beyond the symbol of the Cricket, and, in fact, to persuade Forster of its possibility for success, Dickens now invokes the symbolic associations of his own name:

Seriously I feel a capacity in this name and notion which appears to give us a tangible starting-point, and a real, defined, strong, genial drift and purpose. I seem to feel that it is an aim and name which people would readily and pleasantly connect with me; and that, for a good course and a clear one, instead of making circles pigeon-like at starting, here we should be safe.  
(PL, IV, 328; [Early July 1845])

The image of the cricket on the hearth in connection with Dickens is not entirely new at this point; the second number of the Clock had begun:

The merry cricket on the hearth (my constant visitor) this ruddy blaze, my clock, and I, seem to share the world among us, and to be the only things awake.  
(MHC, I, 25; 33)

And, subsequently, a few weeks after this notion of such

a journal had been discarded, Dickens wrote to Forster with the idea of using the Cricket fancy in a Christmas story: "making the Cricket a little household god--silent in the wrong and sorrow of the tale, and loud again when all went well and happy" (PL, IV, 337; [26 July 1845]). Three months later, in October, he wrote a Christmas tale, "A Fairy Tale of Home," with that title, its frontispiece depicting a family of man, woman and baby, nodding by the blazing fire and visions of fairies all around, and a title-page showing a heavy Dutch clock striking midnight with the fairies again gamboling all through its works. By now Dickens was merely unfolding the sort of narrative that could be predicted from such a fancy.

In view of the naturalness of working out this conceit in a Christmas story, one wonders if it was not the first such tale, A Christmas Carol, written for Christmas 1843 between dreary numbers of Martin Chuzzlewit, which shaped this notion in the first place. The warmth of the reception of A Christmas Carol--also the power felt on the reading of The Chimes to friends--burst on Dickens in the midst of pessimism over the progress of his novel and about his his future as a profitable novel-writer. In complete contrast to the standoffish atmosphere surrounding the reception of Martin Chuzzlewit, readers' letters and congratulations poured in on him. Hence, perhaps, six months later, Dickens could write that such was the type of literature "which people would readily and pleasantly connect with me"--because they had lately done so.

A Christmas Carol had its precedents, in the Sketch, "A Christmas Dinner," and in the "Christmas Chapter" of Pickwick, published in the December number of 1836. At the hearthside of his friends at Dingley Dell, Pickwick sings "A Christmas Carol," and in the next chapter, Mr. Wardle relates "The Story of the Goblins who stole a Sexton," in which a crabbed old graveyard digger is forever altered by his encounter with goblins who rebuke his general misanthropy with the vision of the cheerful fortitude of a family circle as they find themselves separated by suffering through the years. This seems to have been one vision Dickens would work repeatedly in the course of his career. Thus, over these years 1843-48, of anxiety and restlessness about his ability to keep his career intact and his home secure, we have these five tales celebrating the virtues of family life: fantasy controlled the inimical chaotic forces, as real life could not.

The Christmas stories were also the vehicle by which Dickens achieved another type of power: the establishment of the public "philosophy" which is termed "Dickensian" --a rhetoric which argued against the Benthamite and Malthusian reduction of human happiness to a statistical science, and for the importance of individual intuition and charity. Unlike the rhetoric against which it inveighed, the "philosophie de Noël" does not translate very happily from the narratives in which it is evoked into specifiable dictums, and this is an important fact about Dickens's writing as a social commentator. During the same years as he was publishing

these stories--and throughout most of his career as a novelist--he was incompletely successful in his attempt to speak from an officially influential position.

His earlier transition from a mere transcriber of news to "Boz" had been much smoother, perhaps because of the very fact that in coming to narrative writing he had quickly found his most pragmatic medium: the spirit of a Nicklebian progress was quite as consistent or substantial as any editorial page he could have produced. Apart from any ambitions to be a novelist, Dickens's thought intrinsically needed the tools provided by narrative; and serially published narrative, however fortuitously it came to him, ensured the possibility of response and thus a sense of the social effectiveness of his thought. The Christmas stories were a spectacular confirmation of this. And yet he continued to yearn for a profitable alternative to his imaginative discipline, and an institutional context in which to pursue the heroic work of moving men's breasts.

## v

When Dickens turned to seeing himself as an editor again, he wrote: "most of all I have, sometimes, that possibility of failing health or fading popularity before me, which beckons me to such a venture when it comes within my reach" (PL, IV, 423; to Forster [?1 or 2 November 1845]). In this argument, and in the fact that he requested and received from Bradbury and Evans a contract offering two thousand pounds, double the usual editor's salary, we see



the primary significance of Dickens undertaking the Daily News at this time in his life. Other than this, little is prominent in the episode except his hasty resignation from it on 9 February 1846, when his inability to cope with the position's pressures had become unmistakable. Besides the editorial supervision, we know from a letter of 3 November 1845 to Bradbury and Evans, in which he states his terms above, that he had planned to contribute items daily--although the only serial feature mentioned were the letters he had already written from Italy, again, rather an editorial, than a compositional, project.

Nonetheless, when his editorship had ended, he did not give up his plans to use these letters, and just as American Notes outlived Master Humphrey's Clock, so Pictures from Italy survived as a separate project and was published three months later. Dickens also went through with a short series of "Letters on Social Questions" published in the Daily News over the succeeding month (28 February; 9, 13, 16 March), and evidently staked enough on their statements, to speak of publishing them later in a separate pamphlet (PL, IV, 524; 21 March 1846). On 16 March 1845 he wrote to Bradbury and Evans, asking them to consider how soon after June, and at an advantageous part of the year, they might begin a new story in monthly numbers (PL, IV, 521).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See footnote in PL, I, 621 and letter of 27 December 1839 to Edward Chapman (PL, I, 620-21); also, Robert L. Patten, Charles Dickens and His Publishers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 170.



Indeed, at this time, he seemed to be full of new projects. There are a number of letters during these months refusing the chairmanship of various committees and meetings, although he gave only one public speech in 1846. In a letter to Dr. James Kay-Shuttleworth, commonly known as the founder of the English system of popular education, Dickens speaks of having visited four Ragged Schools in March, and of his interest in establishing on a trial basis a new sort of Ragged School, and from the success of that, putting forward innovative legislation outlining a system of government-sponsored education for the poor. The letter strives to project an air of authority and knowledgeability. Notable in the same vein is a lengthy letter to Miss Coutts about the setting-up of an Asylum for "fallen women." The space and insight given to the topic are impressive--again, he speaks of his interest in researching and writing a paper on such a scheme. He also writes:

I do not know whether you would be disposed to entrust me with any share in the supervision and direction of the Institution. But I need not say that I should enter on such a task with my whole heart and soul.  
(PL, IV, 555; 26 May 1846)

By this time, in fact, he had already resolved to go abroad to write a twenty-part novel. In the letter of 20 April to Mitton which announces this, his tone is decisive enough, but in a letter of 17 April to Madame de la Rue we get a more complex picture of the confusing choices presented to him during these months. Possibly, Dickens was on edge during this whole period, calculating his alternatives: the Ragged School, Miss Coutts' project,

social reform pamphlets for legislative action, travel letters, a new book. To Madame de la Rue, he wrote that if the paper failed altogether, he would "be strongly disposed" to leave London and England, and the aforementioned letter to Mitton suggests that, seeing no obvious resolution, he made up his own mind to wait elsewhere for his fate.

But, bizarrely, having stated to Madame de la Rue, that the only choice for him was between Geneva and Lausanne, he demurred and added, of all things,

Against my coming away at all, there is the consideration that I am (nominally, God knows) a Law Student, and have a certain number of 'terms to keep' before I can be called to the Bar; and it would be well for me to be called, as there are many little pickings to be got --pretty easily within my reach--which can only be bestowed on Barristers.  
(PL, IV, 534)

This refers to the fact that Dickens had had himself "enrolled" at Middle Temple in 1839, which mostly meant he appeared at the Inn to "take dinners" (PL, I, 43; 62ln). As many contacts as he had with the world of social administration, this was the only formal qualification for a public administrative position. Its manifest insubstantiality, (and he mentioned it only to this doting woman friend hundreds of miles away) indicates Dickens's own great uncertainty about how he expected to create an income for himself in the future. Next to the consideration that the Daily News or Law might claim, a new novel was merely something that might be done "more comfortably and easily, abroad," a graceful and economical retirement from public life.

The culminating evidence of fundamental insecurity about a vocation is that, having arrived and settled in Lausanne after three weeks, he sent off a letter to Lord Morpeth, sounding out the possibilities of obtaining a position as a public Police Magistrate, and avowing a long-held wish to do so. As in the letters to Kay-Shuttleworth and Miss Coutts, he emphasized the steadiness and authenticity of his interest in public reform, to a degree beyond that of merely a popular author who includes "low" characters in his novels:

On any question connected with the Education of the People, the elevation of their character, the improvement of their dwellings, their greater protection against disease and vice--or with the treatment of Criminals, or the administration of Prison Discipline, which I have long observed closely--I think I could do good service, and I am sure I should enter with my whole heart. ...[N]ever was a man's ambition so peculiarly associated with his constant sympathies--and, as I fancy, with his capabilities--as this of mine. (PL, IV, 566, 567; 20 June 1846)

He stated that he had planned to approach Lord Morpeth or another Member before leaving London but departed in irresolution, as has been seen. Regarding his literary work, he wrote:

I entertain the wish, common to most Literary Men, of having some permanent dependence besides Literature. But I have no thought of abandoning that pursuit, which is a great happiness to me; and only seek this new avocation as its not unnatural offspring and companion. My writings, such as they are, are my credentials; and they have never been more profitable to me, than at this time. (PL, IV, 567)

This letter is a model of tact and authority in setting out his desires without detracting from his established position,

but Forster who, significantly, did not hear of his venture till later, says that nothing came of it, and immediately afterwards Dickens seems to have plunged into Dombey as well as plans for a Christmas book.

Still, we note that even as he rejoiced to Forster over the success of Dombey, Dickens considered another idea for making a living: "a great deal of money might possibly be made (if it were not infra dig) by one's having Readings of one's own books" (PL, IV, 631; [11 October 1846]). And yet again, by [22 and 23 November 1846], even as Dombey continued to flourish, he was scheming, about a new magazine:

As to the Review, I strongly incline to the notion of a kind of Spectator (Addison's)--very cheap, and pretty frequent. We must have it thoroughly discussed. It would be a great thing to found something. If the mark between a sort of Spectator, and a different sort of Athenaeum, could be well hit, my belief is that a deal might be done. But it should be something with a marked and distinct and obvious difference, in its design, from any other existing periodical.  
(PL, IV, 660)

Forster, obviously used to contending with Dickens's enterprunerial dalliances, remarks this only in a passing footnote as "another floating fancy for the weekly periodical which was still and always present to his mind, and which settled down at last, as the reader knows, into Household Words" (Forster, Bk. 4, Chp. 7, p. 443).

By now Dickens's fixation with this idea--"It would be a great thing to found something"--was never to be left behind. Upon his return from Europe, in yet another letter to Forster, he proposed, in reference to Forster's Life of Goldsmith, being completed at this time, that he should write prefaces to

a cheap edition of the great novelists:

Supposing one wrote an essay on Fielding for instance, and another on Smollett, and another on Sterne, recalling how one read them as a child (no one read them younger than I, I think), and how one gradually grew up into a different knowledge of them, and so forth--would it not be interesting to many people? I should like to know if you descry anything in this. It is one of the dim notions fluctuating within me. (Forster, Bk. 6, Chp. 1, pp. 464-65; 5 September 1847)

At this time the cheap edition of his own works had started, and he was writing the preface to accompany Pickwick. It would seem from the letter sent to Forster with this preface, complaining of its difficult composition--"for I really didn't know that I had a word to say, and nothing seems to live 'twixt what I have said and silence" (Forster, Bk. 6, Chp. 1, p. 466; 7 September 1847)--that his favourite childhood authors, by contrast, were still very evocative for Dickens and would have elicited some fresh thought from him. Further, a Cheap Edition of the earlier novelists would not affect his own market value in any way, would not involve the sustained effort of a new novel project (though perhaps provide a sustained income), and would have given Dickens a profitable way of indulging in that vein of benevolent whimsicality which he enjoyed and by which he always strove, rather than in any other way, to bind his readers to him.

Although it remained merely another of his "dim notions," it is important as a project, for illustrating the particular combination of imaginative and social importance which Dickens seemed to crave. The name of "Boz" or "Charles Dickens" was finally the institution

that he would succeed in "founding." He was to do this through the discipline of his imaginative life, and in the end, it was the philosophy of this discipline --"the Romance of everyday life"--that became his most successful editorial position.



CHAPTER III  
THE MEANING OF 'CHARLES DICKENS'

Prefaces to a Cheap Edition of the great British novelists were never written by Dickens, and one might wonder what we have missed learning about Dickens as a writer about fiction.

Cheap reprints of his own work had been proposed in the autumn of 1843 (PL, II, 587; to Forster [1 November 1843]), at a time when Dickens, dispirited about Martin Chuzzlewit, was considering a break with Chapman and Hall. The suggestion at that time, by Bradbury and Evans, that Dickens inaugurate their new partnership with a cheap edition of his works or a new magazine, may indicate a lack of enthusiasm felt about ideas for new fiction. Nonetheless, the project for a new edition was taken up, not at this time, but in the spring of 1847, when Dombey was in the midst of a most successful run. The reprints were designed, with new illustrations, not to interfere with the sales of the novels in their original part issues, and interestingly enough, sold in weekly parts at the price originally suggested for the projected Cricket.

In fact, many of the ventures of these years--the abortive

Cricket journal and Christmas book of that name, the other Christmas books, the proposed Cheap Edition of the great novelists, and the Cheap Edition of his own works--initially took shape as commercial and sociological innovations, the artistic importance of which only came consequentially.

Robert L. Patten's description of the Cheap Edition makes clear the difference between it and the publishing innovations of Dickens's early career:

Each number consisted of one sheet (sixteen pages) printed in double columns, the text running on from number to number without interruption. Even the novels were run-on in the same monthly part: Pickwick sharing with Nickleby, Nickleby with the Shop, and so on. In effect, having experimented with two other kinds of serial publication, Dickens now revised publication in fascicles: these so-called "numbers" and "parts" bear no relation to the self-contained units in which his monthly novels first appeared.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, they bore no relation to the original considerations with which they were composed: these books did not recall the young "Boz" who offered to amuse the public with unique narratives, each with its own timely appearance and character. Instead, presented as an Edition, they represent the entity of "Charles Dickens," and give the sense of being, as Chesterton was to say of all the novels, "simply lengths cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Dickens."<sup>2</sup> When one reads his work in this way, it is an overall

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<sup>1</sup>Patten, Charles Dickens and His Publishers, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup>G.K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens (1906; London: Methuen, 1911), p. 81.

summary of values which emerges in stronger relief than any single plot.

The perception of his work as a coherent social phenomenon must have had its effect on Dickens's own view of his art, and such is what is registered in the prefaces which he wrote for the Edition. It did not mean that he had reified his own processes to the extent of making the content of his future novels quite predictable; but as with his experience in journalism, it must have made him consider how moral value was communicated by his writing. Besides the discrete values which he consciously communicated, his experience as an aspiring magazine editor and as a prefatory commentator on his own work clearly helped him to articulate the growing awareness that his fiction and his name constituted a self-sufficient source of value, a halo of meaning over everyday life, which readers craved. Dickens's proposals for a new edition of the great novelists, though reminiscent of Sir Walter Scott's Lives of the Novelists, does not suggest a rewriting of the authors' Lives, but instead, a fresh way of relating the works to readers' lives: the essays were to be freely personal rather than strictly historical, for the aim is towards making the author accessible to his readers, not just intellectually, but also emotionally.

Further, in the Cheap Edition of his own works there are explicit exhortations to eliminate divisions between oneself and others materially as well as intellectually. In an exultant review of the social reforms effected since

the first publication of Pickwick, Dickens writes in the 1847 preface to that novel:

With such a retrospect, extending through so short a period, I shall cherish the hope that every volume of this Edition will afford me an opportunity of recording the extermination of some wrong or abuse set forth in it.<sup>3</sup>

He views "Cheap Literature," and the reissue of his works in an inexpensive form acting not only as a record of social progress, but also, by its accessibility to the uncultivated classes of society, as a materially reforming agent in itself: the combination of a convenient price and a sympathetic tone makes it an effective propagandizing agent. These distinctive features of the Cheap Edition made it a genuine innovation in the general movement towards the production and consumption of commodities on a mass basis, and this orientation is epitomized by the replacement in the edition's dedication of the traditional prominent aristocrat as the source of an author's favours, by a public patron, "the English people."<sup>4</sup>

Actually these prefaces to the Cheap Edition are merely the most outstanding instance of Dickens's use of prefaces throughout his career. All the addresses to his readers sought to "persuade," by means of a rhetoric quite different

<sup>3</sup>Charles Dickens, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (London: Chapman and Hall, 1847), p. xi.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Dickens, "Address," to the Cheap Edition, Forster, Bk. 5, Chp. 7, pp. 448-49. This dedication was, in fact, never printed.

from the fictional one which originally preceded them.

But if Dickens might have acknowledged in the sincerity of his vocation, that his fictional narration was "persuasive," that is to say, in inducing certain emotions and idea, he curiously avoids any admission that he is seeking to do anything similar in remarks in his own voice.

Upon the first appearance of the second series of the Sketches by Boz, Dickens began an accompanying preface with the comment:

IF brevity be the soul of wit anywhere, it is most especially so in a preface; firstly, because those who do read such things as prefaces, prefer them, like grace before meat, in an epigrammatic form; and, secondly, because nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of every thousand never read a preface at all.<sup>5</sup>

One notes that, despite this early disavowal of confidence in the effectiveness of prefatory remarks, Dickens, unlike some of his contemporaries, continued to compose prefaces for most of the books which he produced over his long career.

Eleven years after this statement, having provided new prefaces for the entirety of his works so far in the Cheap Edition, he adds a general prefatory address, in which he declares: "It is not for an author to describe his own books. If they cannot speak for themselves, he is likely to do little service by speaking for them."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless,

<sup>5</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface to the Second Series of Sketches by Boz" (17 December 1836) Collected Papers, ed. Arthur Waugh (London: Chapman and Hall, 1903), p. 245.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Dickens, "Address" (March 1847; Dombey and Son, Part VI), reprinted, Simon Nowell-Smith, "The 'Cheap Edition' of Dickens's Works," The Library Fifth Series 22 (1967): 246.



despite the consciousness of such objections--that prefaces are useless appendages which tend to detract from the integrity of an artist's fictionally represented vision, as well as to tire his audience--Dickens cannot seem to refrain from indulging in this unsatisfactory pastime. Before examining the statements explicitly offered in the prefaces, one might speculate about what is implied by the concern to address readers in this manner.

In another part of the Cheap Edition, this time in the individual preface to Pickwick, Dickens likens an author who insists upon writing prefaces to "a man who takes his friend by the button at a Theatre Door, and seeks to entertain him with a personal gossip before he goes in to the play."<sup>7</sup> This Ancient Mariner image of the author expresses very aptly the spirit of intimacy and affability which seems to characterize Dickens's disposition towards his readers. In several prefaces there are similar conceits also representing the Dickensian type of intercourse with his audience, and in these he is seen variously: as someone who, with a Publisher by his side, timorously "gives a modest tap at the door of the Public with his Christmas Piece" and greets "his best friend, the Public"<sup>8</sup> with conspicuous assurances of goodwill; as the stage manager making his flourish to

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<sup>7</sup>Dickens, "Preface," Pickwick Papers (1847), p. vii.

<sup>8</sup>Dickens, "Preface to the Second Series of Sketches by Boz," Collected Papers, p. 245.

the audience at a popular fair;<sup>9</sup> as the host who, in an image taken from the first chapter of Tom Jones, keeps an ordinary public house in which paying guests freely demand refreshment according to their specified tastes ("Preface," MHC, II, March 1841); and finally, not even as a public personage selling his wares, but as

a permanent inmate of many English homes, where, in his old shape, he was only known as a guest, or hardly known at all: to be well thumbed and soiled in a plain suit that will bear a great deal, by children and grown people, at the fireside and on the journey: to be hoarded on the humble shelf where there are few books, and to lie about in libraries like any familiar piece of household stuff that is easy of replacement.<sup>10</sup>

In this passage we see a contemporary author aspiring to the privileges of a deceased one, that is, one whose copyright would have become cheap enough for a publisher to reissue his works often and in popular formats which would find their way less controversially into the acceptance of many readers. The notion of intimacy with one's readers, particularly in the Cheap Edition prefaces, is important for both the commercial achievement of successful sales and the democratic aim of propagating the enjoyment of literature.

Dickens's enthusiasm for intimacy with his readers was also displayed in less abstract ways, particularly in

<sup>9</sup>Dickens, "Address," Pickwick Papers, Part X, Collected Papers, pp. 248-49.

<sup>10</sup>Dickens, "Address," "Cheap Edition," rpt. Nowell-Smith, p. 246.

the first preface to a novel where, inserted in the last number of the novel's serial issue, an address to the reader often seems to take on more of a valedictory than a prefatory character, and the main emotion expressed is more like fond regret than jaunty solicitation.<sup>11</sup> The first preface to Martin Chuzzlewit opens with the statement that his remarks are appended,

more because I am unwilling to depart from any custom which has become endeared to me by having prevailed between myself and my readers on former occasions of the same kind, than because I have anything particular to say.

Like a troublesome guest who lingers in the Hall after he has taken leave, I cannot help loitering on the threshold of my book, though these two words, THE END: anticipated through twenty months, yet sorrowfully penned at last: stare at me, in capitals, from the printed page.<sup>12</sup>

And he begins the preface to Dombey and Son: "I CANNOT forego my usual opportunity of saying farewell to my readers in this greeting-place."<sup>13</sup>

In the prefaces to both Little Dorrit and Bleak House

<sup>11</sup>On the single occasion on which he wrote a conventional postscript, rather than a preface--at the conclusion of Our Mutual Friend--it was the result of having collected and published the first volume of monthly parts in February 1865, while the series still had till November 1865 to run; by the time ~~came when~~ Dickens finally composed the "preface" in September 1865, it physically could not have been inserted into the already-bound first volume. Nonetheless, although there later appeared a Cheap Edition and a Charles Dickens edition of the novel, this feature was never altered.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface" (25 June 1844), Martin Chuzzlewit (London: Chapman and Hall, 1844), p. vii.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface" (27 March 1848), Dombey and Son, ed. Alan Horsman (1848; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. lv.

Dickens notes the large numbers of people who have become interested in his work, and is frank about his pleasure in this, saying that he is "deeply sensible of the affection and confidence that have grown up between us."<sup>14</sup> In the preface to Dombey and Son he concludes:

If any of them [the readers] have felt a sorrow in one of the principal incidents on which this fiction turns, I hope it may be a sorrow of that sort which endears the sharers in it, one to another. This is not unselfish in me. I may claim to have felt it, at least as much as anybody else; and would fain be remembered kindly for my part in the experience.<sup>15</sup>

As evidence of this mutual confidence, he seems to wish to discover points of identification between himself and the reader. This is achieved in the prefaces to David Copperfield and A Tale of Two Cities, by asserting how intensely he himself has become involved in the imaginative events of the book, even as he might have been expected, in his authorial role, to act as nothing other than a fully purposeful manipulator of other people's emotions. But in such passages he invokes the image of his own spontaneous participation, saying of David Copperfield, "no one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I have believed it in the writing."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface" (May 1857), Little Dorrit (London: Chapman and Hall, 1857), p. vii.

<sup>15</sup>Dickens, Dombey and Son (1848), p. lv.

<sup>16</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface" (October 1850), David Copperfield (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1850), pp. vii-viii.

And of A Tale of Two Cities:

Throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me; I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself.<sup>17</sup>

This concern to attest to his own "belief" in these works suggests how important it was to both Dickens's view of the aesthetic experience and his self-esteem as an artist that, ideally, a reading of his novels should evoke an intense response of an emotional kind in the reader, and that while undergoing this experience the intellectual distinctions between fiction and life should be eradicated.

It also implies a conviction, held by Dickens, of moral significance being necessarily attendant upon any artistic intervention that he might make in a reader's consciousness. No doubt such a belief would be confirmed by witnessing reactions such as the one observed in 1844 to his reading of The Chimes and described at the end of a letter written to his wife:

If you had seen Macready last night--undisguisedly sobbing, and crying on the sofa, as I read--you would have felt (as I did) what a thing it is to have Power.  
(PL, IV, 235; 2 December 1844)

Such reactions induced the belief that he, through the medium of literature, could elevate, not only his own personal reputation, but also public morale; thus, while providing a means of pleasant diversion for his readers,

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Dickens, "Preface" (November 1859) A Tale of Two Cities (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859), p. v.



it was also part of his professional pride and aspiration to influence each individual "to think better of his fellow men, and to look upon the brighter and more kindly side of human nature."<sup>18</sup>

This is a distinctly moral ambition, and one which required a framework of personal intimacy and goodwill--this made deliberately explicit in the prefaces to his readers, by images such as those of the local inn-keeper and the familiar companion of the fireside--in order to be successfully realized. It indicates not only a privately optimistic view of life's processes, but also an outwardly-directed concern that this optimism be reflected in society. Having no acknowledged institutional position from which to "decree" an imperative to cheerfulness, the most effective strategy is one of insinuation into a familiar hearthside setting.

Social and moral didacticism is undeniably a prominent and recurring feature of the prefaces. In one way, touching upon contemporary social issues was just a means of referring to subject matter which presumably had already been "discussed" as exhaustively as possible in its fictional mode: the political or sociological perspective would be merely a relief from the literary one. This use of social topics may be compared to the use which Sir Walter Scott made of Scottish and English history when writing his prefaces: personal observations and anecdotes on Yorkshire schools or parliamentary government were as natural an approach for

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<sup>18</sup>Dickens, "Preface" Pickwick Papers (1837), p. ix.

Dickens as chronicles of Rob Roy MacGregor or Robert Paterson were for Scott. Discussion of such topics entertained the reader with much of the same material he had enjoyed in the novel itself and yet also demanded little imaginative effort from the novelist. The use of historical notes and arguments to defend the controversial points of his artistic efforts would develop secondarily from this.

Social-minded evangelism was always a feature of his prefatorial writing, and generated diatribes against: the hypocrisies of established religion (Preface to the Cheap Edition of Pickwick Papers); the inefficiency and cruelty of public officials investigating poverty (Preface to the Cheap Edition of Oliver Twist); the State's neglect in providing good education for the poor (Preface to the Cheap Edition of Nicholas Nickleby); the continuing propagation of crime and misery through the system of English prisons and workhouses (Preface to the Cheap Edition of Martin Chuzzlewit; Preface to the Charles Dickens Edition of Martin Chuzzlewit); the abuses of the English legal system (Preface to the First Edition of Bleak House; Preface to the Charles Dickens Edition of Bleak House); and those of the English civil service (Preface to the First Edition of Little Dorrit); the public administration of the Poor Law (Postscript, In Lieu of Preface, to the First Edition of Our Mutual Friend). The prefaces to the Cheap Edition inaugurate a new strain of social didacticism, which differed in focus from that of earlier ones. This is characterized by the difference between the preface

to the Third Edition, and the preface to the Cheap Edition, of Oliver Twist: whereas the first was preoccupied with the elimination of poetic romanticizing in the fictional depiction of crime, the latter focusses on the institutional process of eliminating that crime altogether. In the first, "social realism" is discussed within a literary stylistic context, while in the preface to the Cheap Edition the socially "realistic" novel is viewed as simply one factor in the advancement of communal reform: the social environment has shed its references to mimetic theories of characterization and become its own autonomous source of interest.

In fact, both of these perspectives are to be found throughout Dickens's prefaces, but the latter becomes explicit only when first used as a thematic focus for the occasion of the Cheap Edition. Yet it is noteworthy that both the sentence quoted above from the Cheap Edition --"With such a retrospect..."--which confidently dwells upon a continually social prospect, and the celebration of Cheap Literature's social applications, are missing in the Charles Dickens Edition of the preface to Pickwick Papers: apparently, neither the Cheap Edition's optimism about the progress of social revision nor the faith in his readers' sympathy and understanding seemed to remain as intact as the critical spirit.

To some extent, of course, it is important to caution that the theme of social reform was just that: a theme, which Dickens happily hit upon, after the initial difficulty of which we have seen he complained to Forster when he began

to plan the Cheap Edition--that there was nothing more to say past the works themselves. It was simply one way of talking about his novels, and one that perhaps has more importance for the way in which Dickens composed prefaces, not novels.

Nonetheless, the permeation of Dickens's novels with social topicality has its own difficulties for readers. In reading novels such as Oliver Twist or Little Dorrit readers could not help but becoming interested in the connections which might be discerned between the account of English life given in Dickens's fiction and that given in the newspapers: the generalized features of fictional behaviour might seem to correspond to the statistical picture repeatedly given by the public media. Once such expectations had been aroused, the novel, in the course of its appearance, would be criticized according to its degree of success in seeming typical. Because of the ambiguous mixture of specific detail and generalization in the novels, it was open to Dickens in his prefaces to choose either to defend his representation by recourse to statistics or by denial of any documentary basis whatsoever.

The prefaces were useful to Dickens as a natural place wherein he could specify what he considered the correct attitude to be taken towards his work. But even in these he seems to prevaricate. In the preface to Bleak House, after insisting on his lack of exaggeration in the portrayal of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, he nonetheless concludes with the cryptic statement that he had "purposely dwelt upon the

romantic side of familiar things"; and in the preface to Little Dorrit he obfuscates the exact extent of his knowledge of the Marshalsea's interior, and alternates between casual defensiveness:

If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman....If I might make so bold as to defend that extravagant conception, Mr. Merdle, I would hint that it originated after the Railroad-share epoch, in the times of a certain Irish bank, and one or two equally laudable enterprises<sup>19</sup>

and an equally nonchalant refusal to quibble over incongruities:

But, I submit myself to suffer judgment to go by default on all these counts, if need be, and to accept the assurance (on good authority) that nothing like them was ever known in this land.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Little Dorrit we also have the circumstance, unusual with Dickens, that he made a public reply to criticism of his social satire in a magazine article. C.P. Snow, discussing this article and the review which provoked it, finds it significant for consideration of theories about the self-contained quality of Dickens's symbolism, that Dickens defends his book on the same factual basis on which it had been attacked by Fitzjames Stephen in his article in the Edinburgh Review, "The License of Modern Novelists." In his rejoinder to this article Dickens even takes offence at the idea that a novelist might invoke a fictional "license"

<sup>19</sup>Dickens, "Preface," Little Dorrit (1857), pp. v-vi.

<sup>20</sup>Dickens, "Preface," Little Dorrit (1857), p. vi.



which exempts and, in fact, excludes him from taking responsibility for historical accuracy in his portrayal of society.<sup>21</sup>

That there are fine distinctions to be considered in the controversial status of morality in fiction, is made clear by even a casual look at an article such as "Frauds on the Fairies," where Dickens masterfully lampoons the practice of recasting traditional fairy tales according to the various moral and social hobbyhorses of contemporary sectarianism. This is a spoof of an editorial trend in the Victorian publication of literature which Dickens deplored:

Imagine a Total Abstinence edition of Robinson Crusoe, with the rum left out. Imagine a Peace edition, with the gunpowder left out, and the rum left in. Imagine a Vegetarian edition, with the goat's flesh left out. Imagine a Kentucky edition, to introduce a flogging of that 'tarnal old nigger Friday, twice a week. Imagine an Aborigines Protection Society edition, to deny the cannibalism and make Robinson embrace the amiable savages whenever they landed. Robinson Crusoe would be "edited" out of his island in a hundred years, and the island would be swallowed up in the editorial ocean.<sup>22</sup>

Specifically, this article is directed at the efforts of Dickens's old drinking-friend-turned-teetotaler, George Cruikshank, to publicize and sugar-coat mid-nineteenth-century moral and philanthropic causes through the medium

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<sup>21</sup>See C.P. Snow, "Dickens and the Public Service," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (London: Chapman and Hall, 1970), pp. 125-49. Also, Fitzjames Stephen, "The License of Modern Novelists," Edinburgh Review 106 (July 1857): 124-56; and Charles Dickens, "Curious Misprint in the Edinburgh Review," Household Words 16 (1 August 1857): 97-100.

<sup>22</sup>Charles Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies," Household Words 8 (1 October 1853): 407-08.

of well-known fairy tales in his latest project, called George Cruikshank's Fairy Library series. In the first of these pamphlets and the tale Dickens comments on here, Hop-O'-My Thumb, the reader is shown how drunkenness, card playing, and gambling lead to a family's miseries. The happy ending of the tale is marked, not only by the restoration of the family's fortunes, but also by the institution of public laws banning intoxicating liquors, promoting moral instruction in state schools, foreign grain into the home market, and the commission of public work projects for the bad Giants and Ogres of the story.

Whereas Cruikshank had fastened upon simple children's tales as an attractive vehicle for the advertisement of Victorian mores and institutions, Dickens located their "usefulness" in the disinterested sensibility which they cultivated in the individual reader. Dickens's parody of Cruikshank not only spoofs the tenets of pedestrian bourgeois morality, but also makes a point about the nature of fiction itself: that is to say, how value qua value enters into fiction--not just how prose may invoke certain nameable values, but how participation in the act of imagination is an activity in which value resides.

In his article, "Dickens, Cruikshank, and Fairy Tales,"<sup>24</sup> Harry Stone has suggested that Dickens's notion of imaginative literature's value derived from his early days in London,

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<sup>24</sup>Harry Stone, "Dickens, Cruikshank, and Fairy Tales," Princeton University Library Chronicle 35 (1974): 213-47.

when, as it later seemed to the successful adult, the childhood memory of such literature nourished in the forlorn adolescent the aspirations toward future respectability. By providing a mental escape from oppressively humbling circumstances, literature and the attractions of the imagination also preserved an individualistic sense of moral responsibility, and the sense of a connection to be maintained between himself and some absolute ideality. Thus, the apparently idle pleasures of the imagination became the most significant agent in an individual's adherence, against the contrary influence of his immediate environment, to an abstract code of values and behaviour. This implies that life in contemporary society, however frequently injected with Cruikshankian directives to better conduct, generally had for Dickens an anti-inspirational content: "The world is too much with us, early and late."<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps, like Cruikshank's version of fairy literature, the world's self-appraisal is primarily for Dickens something to be satirized, distanced and objectified. In his own articles, the incorporation of its landmarks is often done through transformation of simple well-known plot-lines and tales: in these, both contemporary detail and traditional story-line remain individually intact. In the novels, however, the world is present in the form of not only specific detail but, more significantly, a conceptual framework also. The Cruikshankian crudeness which he permitted to creep into

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<sup>24</sup>Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies": 412.

his journalism was not a feature of the novelistic style. Yet the novels certainly invoke fairy-tale reminiscences even more profoundly than the articles, and at the same time, topics of great contemporary significance have somehow been incorporated no less frequently. How, for example, does literary criticism measure the obvious differences between censuring British governmental bureaucracy under the label of "the Circumlocution Office," and the bureaucracy of Victorian philanthropy by casting Cinderella as a "Juvenile Band of Hope"? Fitzjames Stephen commented very aptly when he wrote in his review of Little Dorrit:

It is as hard to refute a generality as to answer a sneer, and we therefore feel that in combating such statements as those of Mr. Dickens, we expose ourselves to the retort that we are fighting with shadows of our own raising.<sup>25</sup>

The topicality of Little Dorrit will be discussed at greater length in another chapter; with present reference to the prefaces, the question of the sociological accuracy of Dickens's fiction most often manifests itself under the heading of his methods and concepts of fictional characterization. This is the other way in which Dickens's prefaces deal with the relevance of "reality" to his fiction. And, by extension, this also became a debate between Dickens and the critics of the day about the typical characteristics of "human nature." It is instructive to examine the variety of arguments which

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136. <sup>25</sup> [Fitzjames Stephen], "The License of Modern Novelists":

Dickens used to vindicate his portrayals of human motivation and behaviour.

Applying a naturalistic logic, Jonas Chuzzlewit's brutality and rapacity are declared to be an inbred result of his lifelong environment,<sup>26</sup> while on the other hand, appealing to sense of the strength of spiritual forces against material circumstances, the unselfish devotion of Nancy to Bill Sikes, despite the depravity of her habitual companions and pastimes, is said to be a miraculous instance of "God's truth" (Preface to the Third Edition of Oliver Twist, OT, lxxv). And if these propositions were doubtfully received, it seems that Dickens also had difficulty in convincing the readers of Nicholas Nickleby that any men who made their living as industrial capitalists, such as the Brothers Cheeryble, could also be disinterestedly philanthropic.<sup>27</sup>

To explain the "inconsistency" which was apparently noted of Mr. Pickwick's character, Dickens invokes the principle that:

in real life the peculiarities and oddities of a man who has anything whimsical about him, generally impress us first, and that it is not until we are better acquainted with him that we usually begin to look below these superficial traits, and to know the better part of him.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface" (November 1849), Martin Chuzzlewit (London: Chapman and Hall, 1849), pp. vii-viii.

<sup>27</sup>Charles Dickens, "Preface" (May 1848), Nicholas Nickleby (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848), p. viii.

<sup>28</sup>Dickens, "Preface" (September 1847), Pickwick Papers, p. x.



Similarly, to account for the change in Mr. Dombey, he remarks as a general maxim that there is a common tendency not to see that "an obstinate nature exists in a perpetual struggle with itself,"<sup>29</sup> and that many critics fail to discern that Dombey's breakdown has been conceivable at any juncture in the story. Thus, if readers seemed unlikely to be persuaded by the author's rationalization of his characters' behaviour, he questioned such readers' capacity for insight into human nature. Perhaps the most significant point to realize about all of these defences is that Dickens never quarrels with the fundamental logic of basing an aesthetic judgement of fictional characters on their degree of correspondence with the rules of probability which operate in real human behaviour and events.

However, authorial impatience with his readers' prejudices took on a different form in Dickens's last preface, that to Our Mutual Friend. Here, on the subject of John Rokesmith's "transformation" into John Harmon, he writes:

WHEN I devised this story, I foresaw the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that I was at great pains to conceal exactly what I was at great pains to suggest: namely, that Mr. John Harmon was not slain, and that Mr. John Rokesmith was he. Pleasing myself with the idea that the supposition might in part arise out of some ingenuity in the story, and thinking it worth while, in the interests of art, to hint to an audience that an artist (of whatever denomination) may perhaps be trusted to know what

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<sup>29</sup>Dickens, "Preface" (April 1858), Dombey and Son, Appendix A., p. 834.

he is about in his vocation, if they will concede him a little patience.<sup>30</sup> I was not alarmed by the anticipation.

Unlike the explanations cited so far, Dickens's correction of his readers here does not attempt to base its arguments on the experience or reasoning found in "real life," but instead prefers to assert the independent integrity of the artist's intentions and vision. Dickens congratulates himself, not that there exists any corroborative counterpart in a reader's daily routine for the aesthetic experience, but rather that it arose "out of some ingenuity in the story." The accolades are all for his artistic skill, not for the acumen of any reader who smugly guesses that he has caught the writer in a lapse of concentration.

In Our Mutual Friend Dickens apparently wished to have the reader's interest sustained by both the tension of watching Harmon-Rokesmith pursue some esoteric purpose, and the usual satisfaction at a denouement where the mystery of his identity--of which the reader has been cognisant throughout--is revealed for the story's characters to see also. Dickens's artistic preference has been for this double source of interest rather than simply for the single thrill of the same one-dimensional surprise made to do for both readers and characters:

To keep for a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in

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<sup>30</sup> Charles Dickens, "Postscript, In Lieu of Preface," Our Mutual Friend (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), p. vi.

that leading incident, and turning it to a pleasant and useful account at last, was at once the most interesting and the most difficult part of my design.<sup>31</sup>

This Postscript perhaps lets the reader know that an author's artistic decision can take not only the form of a conventionally arbitrary plot device--such as that having Harmon-Rokesmith resolve the novel by the disclosure of his secret--but also the form of having made an "arbitrary" choice to exercise his reader's application of moral intelligence in the way, for instance, that Shakespeare does when he early initiates us into the secret of the Duke's disguise in Measure for Measure.

It seems, in the case of Our Mutual Friend, that his readers were generally unclear as to whether the novel was supposed to be something of a mystery story as well as a moral fable. Dickens is informing us that it has more affinities with the latter, and that the view of the Harmon-Rokesmith story as a mystery constitutes a mistaken application of the reader's ingenuity. In this light the "failure" of the John Rokesmith disguise to "deceive" the reader completely is best regarded--but rather, in a positive way--as a deliberately-placed insight into a moral purpose and drama. Apparently, for some of his readers the signals had become confused, and Dickens was obliged to reveal his intentions in a non-fictional context. In a similar way, at the end of the preface to Bleak House, Dickens forestalls

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<sup>31</sup>Dickens, "Postscript, In Lieu of Preface," Our Mutual Friend, p. 307.

the readers' misdirected criticisms by stating that he has resolved upon a fantastic rendering of incidents, however factually based they may be in origin.

The impatient tone of the postscript to Our Mutual Friend is not an isolated instance of testiness on Dickens's part. In the preface to the Charles Dickens Edition of Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens gently remonstrates:

WHAT is exaggeration to one class of minds and perceptions, is plain truth to another. That which is commonly called a long-sight, perceives in a prospect innumerable features and bearings non-existent to a short-sighted person. I sometimes ask myself whether there may occasionally be a difference of this kind between some writers and some readers; whether it is always the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?<sup>32</sup>

Again, Dickens does not disparage his readers' basic fund of sympathy, which he acknowledged so happily at the outset of his career, but rather their judgement of human nature and manners, insofar as intelligent interest in these things is integral to the essential content and form of a novel.

Dickens does not hint at the problems of an author merely in relation to his differences of opinion with the reader about typical human behaviour. There is much space given to those problems which can only be peculiar to his authorial position as a methodic director of others' sensibilities, and Dickens is not afraid to be explicit

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<sup>32</sup> Charles Dickens, "Preface," Martin Chuzzlewit (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), p. vi.

about calling such things as the Club in Pickwick Papers, "machinery."<sup>33</sup> He writes in the preface to the Cheap Edition of his Christmas stories:

THE narrow space within which it was necessary to ~~confine~~ these Christmas Stories when they were originally published, rendered their construction a matter of some difficulty, and almost necessitated what is peculiar in their machinery. I never attempted great elaboration of detail in the working out of character within such limits, believing that it could not succeed.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, with the writing of Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens mentions "the temptation of the current Monthly Number" and his consequent efforts to restrain himself and to "keep a steadier eye upon the general purpose and design" towards the improvement of the story.<sup>35</sup>

Dickens concedes that there are problems created by this form for the reader's initial response to a novel, and he sometimes seems to use this fact--like the argument that critics of *Dombey's* conversion may be less adroit judges of human character--as a method of rationalizing readers' unfavourable reception of a novel.

In the preface to the first edition of Little Dorrit, after proclaiming his preference for allowing a story to present itself, without additional explanation or justification, he nonetheless concedes:

<sup>33</sup>Dickens, "Preface," Pickwick Papers (1847), p. vii.

<sup>34</sup>Dickens, "Preface," The Christmas Books (September 1852), Collected Papers, p. 302.

<sup>35</sup>Dickens, "Preface," Martin Chuzzlewit (1844), p. viii.



But, as it is not unreasonable to suppose that I may have held its various threads with a more continuous attention than any one else can have given to them during its desultory publication, it is not unreasonable to ask that the weaving may be looked at in its completed state, and with the pattern finished.<sup>36</sup>

However, this particular sentence is omitted in the preface to the Charles Dickens Edition of Little Dorrit; and in the postscript to Our Mutual Friend a similar sort of statement is immediately qualified by an affirmation of his regard for this method which is so distinctive of his career. When relating the story of how he adopted this method, in the preface to the Cheap Edition of Pickwick Papers, Dickens proudly recalls how dubious his friends and advisors were of its success.

But if the decision made at the beginning of his career to revive the old periodical form was consciously innovative on the part of the young Dickens, contrarily, there are also indications that a consciousness of his place in the light of antecedent literary tradition appears also to have been a comparable source of personal pride. Respect for his literary predecessors also has its place, and its uses, in the prefaces. Thus, Dickens's defence of a disjointed tendency in the construction of Pickwick Papers employs an appeal, not only to its resemblance to life itself, but also to the affinities of such a presentation with the familiar practices of "some of the greatest novelists in the English language," who had also been faced with such objections

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<sup>36</sup>Dickens, "Preface," Little Dorrit (1857), p. v.

in their time.<sup>37</sup> His plea seems to be for the "picaresque" view of life developed by Smollett and Fielding, as an artistic rendering which is both naturalistically detailed and aesthetically esteemed; in this way, he emphasizes both its connections with life and yet also its integrity as art. Considering that the dispute here seems to turn on the basic antithesis between life and art's simulation of it, this is perhaps a paradoxical combination of arguments.

The most elaborate and polished example of such reasoning comes, as has been seen, in the first preface written for Oliver Twist. This preface is preceded by a quotation from Fielding, which sets up the dichotomy between those readers who think that the best art is achieved by a beautifying and discriminating portrayal of life's manners, and the artist who wished to incorporate into his work a more comprehensive choice of material, including elements which would appear to be basically antithetical to established notions of "beauty." Of course, it must be understood that both these arguments, and the methodologies they advance, rely on two ultimate assumptions: firstly, that art is necessarily constituted by being imitative of "Nature"; and secondly, that art has a responsibility to induce men to revise and ameliorate the complexion of that nature and "natural" human behaviour, and thereby cultivate the advance of civilization. However, there is disagreement about whether the latter is best achieved by an artistic

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<sup>37</sup>Dickens, "Preface," Pickwick Papers (1837), p. viii.

representation of the most refined or the most primitive aspects of human conduct in society--that is, whether man is more effectively induced to virtue by the inspiration offered by the ideal or by the shame and indignation aroused by the lowest denominators of human existence.

Dickens clearly indicates his opinion on the matter when he writes in this preface to the third edition of Oliver Twist:

I confess I have yet to learn that a lesson of the purest good may not be drawn from the vilest evil....I saw no reason, when I wrote this book, why the very dregs of life, so long as their speech did not offend the ear, should not serve the purpose of a moral at least as well as its froth and cream. Nor did I doubt that there lay festering in Saint Giles's as good materials towards the truth as any flaunting in Saint James's.  
(OT, lxi)

Further, he goes beyond this mildly-stated proposition, to repudiate vehemently in the name of a self-respecting artist the practice of romanticizing social misery.

Yet, though the plea for greater social candour remained, it is noteworthy that the self-justification by appeal to artistic tradition is omitted in the prefaces to subsequent editions of Oliver Twist, and is not a significant feature of any prefaces thereafter, as the statements of social concern are. The novel and enjoyment of it perhaps seemed no longer in as much need of the rationalization by respectable literary standards. Presumably also, as time went on, Dickens began to feel that he had sufficiently established his own characteristic place in the literary canon and the tastes of his readers, to do without formal

justifications--he felt himself to be an intimate of households and libraries.

In this way, we see that an examination of Dickens's prefaces to his novels is, more than anything else, a revelation and gauge of his continuing relations with readers. Whether it be the problems of composition, the enjoyment of characters and experiences in the novel, concern for the local social environment, or criteria for the judgement of human nature--all are discussed in these prefaces with reference to his readers' participation in these questions. The procedure of bringing out his novels in serial form created a setting in which the reader's consciousness could impinge on the writer in the process of composition, and the "preface" appended on completion of the process became the perfectly suitable record of this interaction.

Dickens's prefaces are not Jamesian-like meditations on his theories about art; nor are they performances conducted in any obvious persona, like Thackeray's Vanity Fair stage manager or Rachel Esmond. Whatever the fictional elements of the persona of "Charles Dickens" which speaks in these prefaces, Dickens must have understood that the trappings of reality surrounding his own identity and the values associated with it lent reinforcement to the imaginative world of the books which were introduced by remarks in that identity.

The very fact that Dickens generally addressed the reader in prefaces, rather than in textual interjections

within the novels themselves, suggests a greater desire to preserve the illusion set up by fictional conventions, and to keep the novel's imaginative world intact. In this respect the prefaces may be seen as expository commemorations of the imaginative experience: the clumsy insistences on his characters' "reality," as well as the lyrical testimonies to his own involvement, are all manifestations of an illusionist who wants his readers, above all, to believe.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE IDEA OF A MISCELLANY: 'THE SHADOW' AND 'THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER'

During the period when the Cheap Edition was being issued, the actual daily work on his books seemed to Dickens to become, if anything, more difficult than ever before. He complained of having to write two stories at the same time, though less than ten years earlier, his day's work had included the writing of Pickwick and Oliver Twist together, and then Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby, among other things. During 1847 and 1848 he concentrated solely on Dombey and Son till its finish, and then on The Haunted Man, otherwise devoting his time to amateur theatrical tours around the country, speeches to charitable organizations, and odd contributions to the Examiner.

There are more of these contributions than was once assumed, and as well as the nature of Dickens's writing for the Examiner--which includes some of his most thoughtful criticism of social institutions--it would be valuable to know all that Dickens must have learned from watching Forster's editing of the paper. Forster was the editor for nearly a decade from November 1847, and most of Dickens's

articles appeared during the years 1848-49.<sup>1</sup> Public affairs in Britain and Europe were very lively at this time, and part of Forster's policy concentrated on creating increased coverage of the significance of these events. Dickens's articles were obviously an enthusiastic part of this effort, and yet he never seems to have attempted to receive any fee or position from the paper with which a number of his friends were involved.

Nor, on the other hand, does he seem to have been inhibited from submitting to Forster's judgement outlines for a very different sort of editorial project. The pragmatic establishment of Household Words may owe much to Dickens's surprisingly continuous experience with the Daily News and the Examiner, and yet its conception remains an incredibly idiosyncratic expression of Dickens's romanticism.

The writing of Dombey was finished in March 1848, that of The Haunted Man by November-December 1848, and David Copperfield was begun at Brighton in February 1849, as "Mag's Diversions." That summer's holiday at Bonchurch marked a seemingly innocuous, but gestative, period of time. As well as the autobiographical parts of David Copperfield, it was during these months that the outline for Household Words came to Dickens more clearly. He wrote to Forster of his diligence at Copperfield but also of stray thoughts

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<sup>1</sup> A.W.C. Brice has added much to our information on these contributions in his "Dickens and the Examiner: Some Newly Identified Essays" (M. Litt. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1968). Over twenty essays and reviews were written in this period.

given to "the dim design," which Forster tells us was "the weekly periodical so often in his thoughts" (Forster, Bk. 6, Chp. 3, p. 500). On the eve of leaving for Broadstairs in September, it was stronger than ever: "I think I have, without a doubt, got the Periodical notion" (Forster, Bk. 6, Chp. 3, p. 504).

The news in his publishers' half-yearly accounting, that the sales of the first three numbers of David Copperfield had been disappointing was notable for determining him to begin the periodical the following spring (Forster, Bk. 6, Chp. 4, p. 509); and finally in a letter of 7 October 1849, he speaks of the ideas that were coming together without much forcing:

a weekly journal, price either three-halfpence or twopence, matter in part original and in part selected, and always having, if possible, a little good poetry. ...Upon the selected matter, I have particular notions. One is, that it should always be a subject. For example, a history of Piracy; in connection with which there is a vast deal of extraordinary, romantic, and almost unknown matter....A history of remarkable characters, good and bad, in history; to assist the reader's judgment in his observation of men, and in his estimates of the truth of many characters in fiction. All these things, and fifty others that I have already thought of, would be compilations; through the whole of which the general intellect and purpose of the paper should run, and in which there would be scarcely less interest than in the original matter. The original matter to be essays, reviews, letters, theatrical criticisms, &c. &c. as amusing as possible, but all distinctly and boldly going to what in one's own view ought to be the spirit of the people and the time....Now to bind all this together, and to get a character established as it were which any of the writers may maintain without difficulty, I want to suppose a certain SHADOW, which may go into any place, by sunlight, moonlight, starlight, firelight, candlelight, and be in all homes, and all nooks and corners, and be supposed to be cognisant of everything, and go everywhere, without the least difficulty. Which may be in the Theatre, the Palace, the House of Commons, the Prisons, the Unions, the Churches, on the Railroad, on the Sea, abroad and at home: a kind of semi-omniscient,

omnipresent, intangible creature. I don't think it would do to call the paper THE SHADOW: but I want something tacked to that title, to express the notion of its being a cheerful, useful and always welcome Shadow. I want to open the first number with this Shadow's account of himself and his family. I want to have all the correspondence addressed to him. I want him to issue his warnings from time to time, that he is going to fall on such and such a subject; or to expose such and such a piece of humbug...a creature which isn't the Spectator, and isn't Isaac Bickerstaff, and isn't anything of that kind: but in which people will be perfectly willing to believe and which is just as mysterious and quaint enough to have a sort of charm for their imagination, while it will represent common-sense and humanity.  
(Forster, Bk. 6, Chp. 4, pp. 510-11)

If anything, Dickens's ambitions seem only to have increased since the days of Master Humphrey's Clock. The variety of topics for selected matter tends to the encyclopedic, while the organization of the original matter--"all distinctly and boldly going to what in one's view ought to be the spirit of the people and the time"--under the insatiable curiosity of "The Shadow," tends almost to an unconscious totalitarianism. In this, he disclaims quite correctly any resemblance to the personas of Mr. Spectator or Isaac Bickerstaff, who were certainly not "at everybody's elbow, and in everybody's footsteps." The scope of comment proposed here and the strength of persona (or, rather, personality) necessary to keep it unified are formidable; and on this occasion Forster saw the pitfalls immediately:

The ordinary ground of miscellaneous reading, selection, and compilation out of which it was to spring, seemed to me no proper soil for the imaginative produce it was meant to bear. As his fancies grew and gathered round it, they had given it too much of the range and scope of his own exhaustless land of invention and marvel; and the very means proposed for letting

in the help of others would only more heavily  
have weighted himself.  
(Forster, Bk. 6, Chp. 4, p. 512)

Interesting, that Forster also deems this proposal as  
"so described in his letter hardly anything more characteristic  
survives him"; and noteworthy, too, that Forster's remarks  
here seem among his most insightful into that character. It  
would tell us, if we did not already know from the history of  
Household Words itself, what powerful trunk of moral purpose  
supported the profusive out-growth of Dickens's imaginative  
vision.

Through discussions with Forster, the whole conception  
was adapted to a more practicable scale. And thus, the  
outline of the Shadow yields to the simple declaration in  
"A Preliminary Word," that: "We aspire to live in the  
Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household  
thoughts, of our readers." Dickens was able to condense the  
romanticism of his original conceit into a statement which  
expresses it much more efficiently than personification of  
the Shadow would have done: "To show to all, that in all  
familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the  
surface, there is Romance enough if we will find it out."

This could never have been a merely abstract statement  
of policy in any magazine "conducted by Charles Dickens":  
although the childish persona was judiciously edited out  
of the format by Forster, the things of childhood continued  
to nourish Dickens's editorial sense. "A Preliminary Word"  
includes, as well as this business-like statement of  
philosophic intent, the inspiration of a fairy-tale:



The adventurer in the old fairy story, climbing towards the summit of a steep eminence on which the object of his search was stationed, was surrounded by a roar of voices, crying to him, from the stones in the way, to turn back. All the voices we hear, cry Go on! The stones that call to us have sermons in them, as the trees have tongues, as there are books in the running brooks, as there is good in everything! They, and the Time, cry out to us Go on!<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Household Words projects not only a social-minded programme which will dose its readers with a cheerful view of modern life, but exposes at the same time also, the very scaffolding--Dickens's childhood reading--which made it both compelling and possible for him, in particular, to set up such a programme.

His own article for the first issue of the journal, "The Amusements of the People," typically makes the point that the working classes are better citizens when provided with their public recreations; but we notice that Dickens still decided that this first issue was wanting in "Fancy," and that he remedied this to his own satisfaction with the second issue's very different opening piece, "A Child's Dream of a Star." He was still writing David Copperfield at this time, and Forster tells us that his sister Fanny's early death in 1848 "had vividly reawakened all the childish associations which made her memory dear to him" (Forster, Bk. 6, Chp. 4, p. 514). This fairy-tale-cum Christian parable may have been

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Dickens, "A Preliminary Word," Household Words 1 No. 1 (30 March 1850): 2.

very evocative to Dickens himself, but lacking space or length in which to develop, it is poorer reading than his documentary piece.

Dickens here confounds, as he did in Master Humphrey's Clock, his sources of fancy as an imaginative reader, with those subjects which were best suited (or not) to his development of them as a journalistic writer. What would have attracted the reader as a potential incident in David Copperfield's childhood is here only summarized, because in the journalism, unlike the novels, fantasy has become one among a list of polemical points to be made. The persuasiveness inherent in the narrative of a novel like David Copperfield is replaced by another type of argumentation: the rhetoric of fiction is subordinated to that of syllogism. Without the indulgence of length, which is inherent in the narrative of his novels, Dickens's visions fail to persuade. We have seen that the Miscellany articles yielded to Oliver Twist, and Master Humphrey's adventures, to The Old Curiosity Shop. Similarly, when the sales of Household Words started to droop in 1853, at the same time as Bleak House had just enjoyed a phenomenally successful run, Dickens was asked by his publishers to revive them with a weekly story serialised over five months. His response, Hard Times, was self-conscious about its topicality and its thesis about Fancy, but undoubtedly for the readers of Household Words, its most potent rhetoric consisted of its story.

This fact must have become clear to Dickens himself, for when he launched the magazine which was most completely

his own property, All the Year Round, it opened with the first instalment of a novel. To draw attention to the point, the new magazine included not only the narrative of A Tale of Two Cities but, importantly also, a statement at the end of its run, that

We purpose always reserving the first place in these pages for a continuous original work of fiction, occupying about the same amount of time in its serial publication, as that which is just completed....And it is our hope and aim, while we work hard at every other department of our journal, to produce, in this one, some sustained works of imagination<sup>3</sup> that may become a part of English Literature.

More than twenty years after the prospectus to Bentley's Miscellany was written, Dickens is still attempting to draw integral literary monuments out of ephemera and improvisation --the difference now being that the intervening years of pragmatic experience have made this an entirely realistic ambition.

However, a change in Dickens's strategies may be seen in the contrasts between the adventures of Master Humphrey and those of "The Uncommercial Traveller." When A Tale of Two Cities finished, Dickens travelled a fortnight in the Midlands giving readings, and then spent time trying to set up a new serial for the journal after the run of The Woman in White. He failed to get either George Eliot or Mrs. Gaskell, finally obtaining an agreement in January 1860 from Charles Lever, to begin a novel the next July. In the

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Dickens, All the Year Round 2 (26 November 1859): 95.

midst of these negotiations, he wrote to Wilkie Collins --"I think of coming in to back you up if I can get an idea for my series of gossiping papers"<sup>4</sup>--and in January, the first in the series of The Uncommercial Traveller appeared.

"His General Line of Business" begins in demur --"Allow me to introduce myself--first, negatively"<sup>5</sup>-- thus seeming to echo Master Humphrey's first sentence, "The reader must not expect to know where I live." This negativeness is also present in the title chosen and in the contrasts drawn between himself and the conventional image of the commercial traveller. Again, like Master Humphrey, his interest in the world is shown to be unconventional: his only speculations are in "Human Interest." He gives his address as Covent Garden, but does not confine his travels to London, nor speak of any regular coffee-house acquaintances.

The preface to his writings contains no mention of moral aims but vaguely and simply offers "many little things, which, because they interest me, I think may interest others."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Charles Dickens, The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. W. Dexter (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch Press, 1938), iii, 145; 7 January 1860. All future page references to this edition will be incorporated in my text, preceded by "NL" and the appropriate volume number, and enclosed in parentheses.

<sup>5</sup>Dickens, "The Uncommercial Traveller," All the Year Round 2 (28 January 1860): 321.

<sup>6</sup>Dickens, All the Year Round 2 (28 January 1860): 321.

These turn out to consist of visits to charitable institutions, London street-life, country-wanderings, a few unique adventures, with some macabre tales and many anecdotes mixed in everywhere. The personal histories of individual figures, mostly working- or pauper-class, appear, either humorously, as part of a broad facetious fancy, or soberly, as parable-like arguments for a social reform thesis. In all these, the student of Dickens recognizes an almost unmediated reflection of his interests throughout his life. No representation of an old man or a "Shadow" is needed when the name and figure of Charles Dickens carries its own persona and associations. These may bear but a tangential relation to his real life, and there is, in fact, perhaps much of the "shadowy" character about this persona. But the series as a whole does have unity given to it, sometimes by repeated references, generally by the common setting of London and contemporary issues.

In a very real way, of course, the animistic imagination of Dickens himself reassures with its constant light, and smooths over some rather careless transitions between scenes and stories. Why else should we marvel over what would otherwise be frowned upon as a mere run-on sentence:

Those inscrutable pigeon-hole offices, with nothing in them (not so much as an inkstand) but a model of a theatre before the curtain, where, in the Italian Opera season, tickets at reduced prices are kept on sale by nomadic gentlemen in smeary hats too tall for them, whom one occasionally seems to have seen on race-courses, not wholly unconnected with strips of cloth of various colours and a rolling ball--those Bedouin establishments, deserted by the tribe, and tenantless, except when sheltering in one corner an



irregular row of ginger-beer bottles, which would have made one shudder on such a night, but for its being plain that they had nothing in them, shrunk from the shrill cries of the news-boys at their Exchange in the kennel of Catherine-street, like guilty things upon a fearful summons.<sup>7</sup>

Here, one cannot help thinking back to the Sketches, where the young Dickens had written, for example, in "Shops and their Tenants":

WHAT inexhaustible food for speculation do the streets of London afford! We never were able to agree with Sterne in pitying the man who could travel from Dan to Beersheba, and say that all was barren; we have not the slightest commiseration for the man who can take up his hat and stick, and walk from Covent-garden to St. Paul's churchyard, and back into the bargain, without deriving some amusement--we had almost said instruction--from his perambulation....

One of our principal amusements is to watch the gradual progress--the rise or fall--of particular shops.

Study of the revisions of the Sketches shows that Dickens moved increasingly to alter their predominant tone, from one of irony and facetiousness to one of sentiment and compassion; and his subsequent arrangements of them for book publication reinforced on the overall level, a narrative "rhythm" which takes the reader from the heights of amusing absurdity through an arc into pathos--"the rise or fall--of particular shops."<sup>9</sup> The endings of both

<sup>7</sup>Dickens, "A Sermon in the Britannia Theatre," All the Year Round 2 (25 February 1860): 417.

<sup>8</sup>Dickens, Sketches by Boz (1839), p. 67.

<sup>9</sup>See Virgil Grillo, Charles Dickens' Sketches by Boz (Boulder, Colorado: The Colorado Associated University Press, 1974), Chp. 5.

the individual pieces and the thematic sections in the Sketches work to leave the reader in the tide of sentiment.

The most successful of The Uncommercial Traveller pieces have the same progression and combination of curiosities and pathos. An examination of this early personal journalism and the last, the popular personas of "Boz" and "The Uncommercial Traveller," would certainly offer many points of comparison, and could form a study in itself. Comment must be limited here to observing only, that the older Dickens's journalistic prose runs in lengthier, more ambitious, and more dignified, periods. This bears out one's feelings about his writing as a whole, the differences felt between an early work like Nicholas Nickleby and a later one such as Great Expectations: that what was naturally left behind in simplistic pristine sparkle, was impressively made up for in musculature and precision.

The Uncommercial Traveller allowed Dickens to speak, as in the Sketches, not only with the first-person voice, but in his own voice. They are thus, broadly speaking, all autobiographical, unified by one imaginative identity, and it is the most intensely autobiographical among them which form a short sub-series. These are the ones entitled "The German Chariot" (afterwards "Travelling Abroad"), "Visit to the City Churches" (afterwards "City of London Churches"), "Associations of Childhood" ("Dullborough Town"), "Houselessness" ("Night Walks"), and "Nursery Stories" ("Nurse's Stories"), published from April to September 1860.

"The German Chariot" recalls his restless movements about Europe but also begins with an anecdote of a "very queer small boy" dreaming on Gadshill. "Visit to the City Churches" breaks out, during a description of lovers in a drowsy church, in allusion to his youthful courtship of Maria Beadnell, "And O, Angelica, what has become of you, this present Sunday morning when I can't attend to the sermon; and, more difficult question than that, what has become of Me as I was when I sat by your side."<sup>10</sup> "Associations of Childhood" explicitly recalls his boyhood in Rochester, ending mournfully, "Ah! who was I that I should quarrel with the town for being changed, to it! All my early readings and early imaginations dated from this place, and I took them away so full of innocent construction and guileless belief, and I brought them back so worn and torn, so much the wiser and so much the worse!"<sup>11</sup>

"Houselessness" refers to probably the most deeply traumatic link of his adulthood with his childhood, which Robert Newsom has discussed in his book on Dickens: how his father's death triggered off a fortnight's series of such walks, perhaps compulsively recreating the sensations of his early adolescence when his father's bankruptcy

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<sup>10</sup>Dickens, "Visit to the City Churches," All the Year Round 3 (5 May 1860): 87.

<sup>11</sup>Dickens, "Associations of Childhood," All the Year Round 3 (30 June 1860): 278.

prematurely made him almost a vagrant on the streets of London.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps not entirely unconsciously Dickens writes of the fact that he met with no crime on these walks: "my houselessness had many miles upon miles of streets in which it could, and did, have its own solitary way."<sup>13</sup> And "Nursery Stories" concludes, in a similar vein, about some of the private horrors of his imagination:

Such are a few of the uncommercial journeys that I was forced to make, against my will, when I was very young and unreasoning. And really, as to the latter part of them, it is not so very long ago --now I come to think of it--that I was asked to undertake them once again, with a steady countenance.<sup>14</sup>

This appeared on 8 September 1859, the month during which Dickens took up permanent residence at Gadshill. The burning of twenty-years' correspondence at this time must have made many scenes of the past rise up before him.

Forster particularly notes the personal character of the papers and his own enjoyment of them: "For delightful observation both of country and town, for the wit that finds analogies between remote and familiar things, and for humorous personal sketches and experience, these are perfect of their kind" (Forster, Bk. 8, Chp. 5, p. 676). On some date which he does not specify, after

<sup>12</sup>Robert Newsom, Dickens on the Romantic Side of Familiar Things: Bleak House and the Novel Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), Chp. 4.

<sup>13</sup>Dickens, "Houselessness," All the Year Round 3 (21 July 1860): 352.

<sup>14</sup>Dickens, "Nursery Stories," All the Year Round 3 (8 September 1860): 521.

The Uncommercial Traveller had made its appearance, he had suggested to Dickens "that he should let himself loose upon some humorous conception, in the vein of his youthful achievements, in that way" (Forster, Bk. 9, Chp. 3, p. 733). Perhaps Forster saw a happy return to the comic vein of the Sketches and Nicholas Nickleby, and therefore encouraged Dickens in the indulgence of it, though it is unclear if anything of length was foreseen.

At the first inspiration of what was to become Great Expectations, Dickens wrote to Forster, of how the piece he was hoping to finish that day for The Uncommercial Traveller, had opened up

such a very fine new, and grotesque idea...that I begin to doubt whether I had not better cancel the little paper, and reserve the notion for a new book. You shall judge as soon as I get it printed. But it so opens before me that I can see the whole of a serial revolving on it, in a most singular and comic manner.  
(Forster, Bk. 9, Chp. 3, p. 733)

Of course, when it occurred to him to extend its development, that meant the familiar twenty parts. Ironically, nonetheless, as with his first authorial projects also, Dickens voluntarily modified the idea to fit a publisher's space--even when the publisher happened to be himself: "The property of All the Year Round is far too valuable, in every way, to be much endangered....Now, if I went into a twenty-number serial, I should cut off my power of doing anything serial here for two good years--and that would be a most perilous thing" (Forster, Bk. 9, Chp. 3, pp. 733-34).

Thus, in his effort to mediate between his first feelings



about a story and the equally pressing desire to develop a successful weekly, we see Dickens here, whatever his past achievements, still behaving almost as if to repeat the situation of twenty years ago, when another story of a child and a disreputable old man was spun out in order to save the "property" of Master Humphrey's Clock, also a journal which he had just managed to establish independently of a disagreeable publisher. In both cases, we should echo Monod's comment on the inception of The Old Curiosity Shop: "The impression produced by Dickens' early works is thus splendidly confirmed: the peculiar temper of Dickens' genius enabled him to build a monumental and enduring structure on the basis of a series of extemporizations."<sup>15</sup>

Dickens himself seems to show a predilection for the concise incidental pieces--it was with these Spectator-like sallies that he launched Master Humphrey's Clock and The Uncommercial Traveller. It was with such that he launched his career in fiction. Master Humphrey's Clock marked a self-instigated progression from Sketches by Boz because there Dickens tried to bring to his writing, not only his acknowledged talent for the comical observation of manners, but also that romantic sensitivity to loss, renunciation, and the past, which often marks the preoccupations of novelists. The Uncommercial Traveller pieces of the summer of 1859 show how much more proficient he finally became in this mode, from the green maudlinism of Master

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<sup>15</sup>Monod, Dickens the Novelist, p. 172.

Humphrey's Clock. But his readers made him aware that it was in his novels, in narratives where he had the space and length of fictional time to exercise the complementary qualities for which David Copperfield was also notable--"that I was a child of close observation...that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood"<sup>16</sup>--that Dickens discovered the most satisfying arrangement of his artistic gifts.

Hence perhaps it was that in 1859 he did not vacillate so uncertainly as he had in 1841, to launch into a retrospective narrative of a child's sensibility. That he was aware of the peculiar artistic framework he was setting up for himself, is shown by his re-reading of David Copperfield at this time. In general, too, the policy of All the Year Round relied more matter-of-factly on the sustenance of serialized novels than even Household Words, and was financially more successful than the latter had ever been.

Dickens wrote fewer articles during this last decade, but even with the hectic activity as an editor and performer which took away from his time for writing, did not renounce the habit of composing full-sized novels. The success at the beginning of his career, which had been characterized by his ability to recast an unremarkable genre into a setting which perfectly displayed his own exhilarating gifts, deepened into a seasoned knowledgeability--finally

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<sup>16</sup>Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1850), Chp. 2, p. 10.

enabling him at its end, to establish himself as the publisher, of a literary format which thus exacted, and yet nurtured, the visions of the writer.

CHAPTER V  
NARRATIVE RHETORICS: BLEAK HOUSE

The serial novel of twenty monthly parts may have been his most personal innovation and vehicle, but it remains remarkable that Dickens, as he grew in experience of it, seems to have seen only more facets to its form, rather than fewer. Perhaps the most interesting experiment of this kind was the impressive construction of Bleak House and its division of twenty parts into two narratives.

In amidst all his writing projects for Household Words, Bleak House seems to have been thought of from the start as a novel and, more precisely, as a novel of the twenty-part length. But this familiar enough modelling of his ideas was formalized further by the institution of a double narrative. There are really very few explicit clues to tell us why he found this procedure useful or desirable. The success of David Copperfield may have encouraged the experiment with a first-person voice again, but the relatively compressed treatment of Esther's childhood, combined with her role as an innocuous witness of contemporary conditions, are, in fact, more reminiscent of a Master

Humphrey-like history and function. Her portion of the book assimilates a surprising diversity of phenomena, and it might be considered how this makes a difference to the imaginative world of a novel which otherwise might have consisted monolithically of a romantic mystery. In separating out and formalizing the distinctions between mystery and moral fable, how has Dickens altered the way in which the elements of both traditionally combine in the novel to project a story's interest and values? Can the different aspects of a novel's meaning be seen to be compartmentalized?

The opening of the omniscient narrative in the novel entrances the reader immediately and in itself seems to proclaim, incisively and dramatically, the Meaning of the novel. The physical details of the Chancery world set up a symbolic scheme or relation which is evoked throughout the rest of the novel, and critical discussion of the novel's thematic and symbolic patterning consistently refers back to this description.

But the same rhetoric which establishes the satirical and symbolic presence of Chancery is also a rhetoric which works to impress upon the reader's consciousness the presence of a narrator directing the passage. One is reminded of the definition of narrative in its most basic sense: "all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966; rpt. 1975), p. 4.



Robert Garis has described this felt presence: "all the landscapes, all the dramatic scenes come to us in a voice in which we hear an infectious delight in what it, itself, is doing--infectious because the pleasure often spills over on to the material itself....[T]he source of Dickens's enjoyment here is not only the scene before him but his own skill in rendering that scene, and that he consciously and proudly offers us that skill for our enjoyment and our applause."<sup>2</sup> This is no Jamesian attempt to simulate the dramatic and essentially anti-narrative presentation of a character's consciousness.

Not all the beginnings of Dickens's novels are equally successful. Some, generally in the early novels such as Nicholas Nickleby and Martin Chuzzlewit, strike us as feebly formal in their opening gambits, made more so by Dickens's self-conscious attempts to carry them out off-handedly in a mock-conventional vein. Martin Chuzzlewit's existence, like Joseph Andrew's, is justified by the establishment of a supercilious pedigree:

As no lady or gentleman, with any claims to polite breeding, can possibly sympathise with the Chuzzlewit Family without being first assured of the extreme antiquity of the race, it is a great satisfaction to know that it undoubtedly descended in a direct line from Adam and Eve; and was, in the very earliest times, closely connected with the agricultural interest.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Garis, The Dickens Theatre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit (London: Chapman and Hall, 1844), p. 1.

Such openings, if recalled at all after the first reading, are generally felt to be unsuccessful, and excused as the early attempts of the young writer to find his own narrative voice--an uncertainty which emphatically is not present in the opening paragraphs of Bleak House, where the scene and time of the narrative are established in the first eighteen words:

London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather.<sup>4</sup>

Dickens does not, as in the original version of Oliver Twist which appeared in Bentley's Miscellany, use the allegorical shorthand of a place name like "Mudfog" to denote all the physical and moral attributes enumerated here; nor does he, as in the revised book form of Oliver Twist, forego even the connotations of a name to cite merely "a certain town, which for many reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to which I will assign no fictitious name" (OT, I, fn.1). Rather, in Bleak House he both names London, and shapes specific features into the service of narrative meaning and intention.

The brusque shorthand manner which neatly engorges dinosaur-sized strings of fancy is more immediately impressive also than the bland tone and geography--"In the year 1775, there stood upon the borders of Epping Forest"--tried in

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<sup>4</sup>Charles Dickens, Bleak House, eds. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (1853; New York: Norton, 1977), p. 5. All future page references to this work will be incorporated in my text, preceded by "BH" and inserted in parentheses.

Barnaby Rudge. By 1851 Dickens had come a long way from genial Henry Fieldingesque introductions of character and setting.

The beginning of Bleak House is not unlike the opening of Dombey and Son, which itself showed a great contrast to its traditionally picaresque predecessor, Martin Chuzzlewit. Both Dombey and Son and Martin Chuzzlewit open satirically. But whereas Dickens's satire of polite English society and the mimetic literary conventions which have grown from it, imitated in the genealogy of the Chuzzlewits, does not achieve the distinguished philosophical authority and geniality of Fielding's prefatory chapters nor the genuine improvisational quality of Sterne's prose, it does begin to find its own tone in Dombey and Son. In Martin Chuzzlewit we are not really impressed or amused by Dickens's remarks about men being like monkeys and swine, or by his elaborate construction of the Tristram Shandy-like malapropisms about the Chuzzlewit family. Curiously, Dickens's flirtation with this genre is lacking in the edge and warmth of Sterne's wordplay.

The difference may be in the attitude with which the eighteenth-century writers treated their material: certainly they had embraced realistic mimesis of the novel form, but their characters, particularly their well-bred heroes, were handled with all of the desire traditionally invested by writers of romance in their knights and princes, such that the property of Squire Allworthy was a sincere attribute of his virtue as well as an indication of his class.

Dickens does not shrink from ensuring that his hero ultimately receives a Tom-Jones-like restitution of money and station, but resentment of the English class system is also expressed within the narrative. The conventional eighteenth-century mode of satirizing his hero's ancestry leads reflexively into comments that

Indeed, it may be laid down as a general principle, that the more extended the ancestry, the greater the amount of violence and vagabondism; for in ancient days, those two amusements, combining a wholesome excitement with a promising means of repairing shattered fortunes, were at once the ennobling pursuit and the healthful recreation of the Quality of this land.<sup>5</sup>

In the concluding touches to these passages in the first chapter, Dickens has passed from treating family genealogies according to aesthetic literary conventions of satire to treating them as items in another sort of satire which implies the existence of class differences between the characters of nobility found in novels and the readers of those novels. Whereas, formerly, middle-class novel-readers were presumed to take an unforced interest in the doings of aristocratic heroes and heroines, here they are exhorted not only to mock the fussy conventions of genteel literature, but also, to censor the real-life behaviour such conventions represent.

This tendency is accelerated in Dombey and Son, and in the first few chapters of Bleak House Dickens has found the perspective and tone with which he wants to view the dominant classes of English society:

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<sup>5</sup>Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 1.

Both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage; oversleeping Rip Van Winkles, who have played at strange games through a great deal of thundery weather; sleeping beauties, whom the Knight will wake one day, when all the stopped spits in the kitchen shall begin to turn prodigiously!

It is not a large world. Relatively even to this world of ours, which has its limits too (as your Highness shall find when you have made the tour of it, and are come to the brink of the void beyond), it is a very little speck. There is much good in it; there are many good and true people in it; it has its appointed place. But the evil of it is, that it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun. It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air.

(BH, 10-11)

As has been noticed, fairy-tale references are prominent here, but they are used to evoke the aristocratic world as the underside of a larger world: far from representing the consummation of all previous desires and struggles, the fashionable world's "season" is seen to be the dormant winter before the spring. The Knight who will transform this world suggests the possibility of a more ideal world; and hence, by contrast, the contemporary mimetic details are made to appear to the reader in a dissatisfying or non-wish-fulfilling context. From this opening, one gets a clear idea of the challenge Dickens has set himself to work out in this novel. Of course, such is generally what the beginning of any novel communicates, but the opening of Bleak House is an extraordinarily resonant invocation of the status quo which it will be the task of the novel to confront and perhaps subvert. What was



only hinted at in Martin Chuzzlewit has become the animating principle of a complete world.

## i

But there are two narratives in Bleak House, and therefore two beginnings. If we compare the omniscient tone of the Chancery and Fashion chapters with the authority of the narrative voice in Pickwick and Dombey, then, analogously, we may think of the openings of David Copperfield and Great Expectations, when coming upon the first-person voice of Esther.

The modesty inherent in all three novels' introductions of the main character immediately disarms, though Esther's carries this almost to personal nihilism. The charm of the recollective voice which is so firmly associated with the chronicles of David and Pip is present to some extent in Esther's narrative of her childhood, particularly in the account of her journey to Reading with the oddity of Mr. Jarndyce sitting across from her; but the mood of the story-telling past tense is broken into by the fussy present-tense interjections of Esther showing herself in the act of writing out her past. This tendency is present from the very first sentence--"I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever" (BH, 17)--to the very disavowal of possible interest in her story--"It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of my life!" (BH, 27).

Such interruptions of the narrative are hardly to be found in David Copperfield until the closing panegyric to Agnes, nor in Great Expectations at all. In those novels the contrast between the final perspective of the writer and the limitations of his earlier consciousness is formative and logically integral to the whole novel, whereas with Esther, even at the distance of years, Dickens prefers to continue to dramatize the features of an immature consciousness, in an extraneous way. David's moral sensibility, particularly in the prison-visiting episode, may unwittingly show its shortcomings, but that is not a clearly signalled narrative intention, as it is throughout Esther's account, even to her final study in the mirror at the end of the novel.

If we are to take Esther's demurs seriously, that is, as indicating Dickens's own intentions for his story, then it is not the childhood or psychology of an orphan which is the subject, however attractively treated, as only Dickens can. We notice that her history is not allotted one entire chapter to itself: before the end of the third chapter of the first number, we are already directed back into the regions of Chancery by "a drawling sound in the distance" (BH, 31), and in the next and final chapter of the number, observing the Jellybys. The topicality of these two settings and the urgency of Dickens's interest in the abuses of Chancery and overseas charities is well-known, and the mundane detail of Esther's observations makes his point strongly and meticulously. Accepting the premise that such

topics are to be Dickens's interest in this scene, we realize that Esther's reactions to all that she sees--her attempts to comfort the children and tidy the house--are not intended so much as revelations of her admirable character, as of the projected criticisms and corrections of the state of affairs being examined.<sup>6</sup> What is intolerable, when seen simply as the wholesome attributes of a heroine whose inner development we imagine we are following, becomes comprehensible when seen, rather, as a social or satirical account: that is, Esther's actions have moral, but not psychological, relevance.

The shift in strategy from Esther presented as a forlorn vulnerable child in a story with overtones of mystery and romance in her birth, to Esther as the critical examiner of Jellyby housekeeping, is similar to that when David Copperfield not only feels the relief of seeing the punishment of his enemy Uriah Heep, but must go on to proselytize about the keeping of society's criminals. The narrative intention and mode has shifted, according to Dickens's interests. In Bleak House, the nature of the interest in the Jellybys

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly, fifteen years later, the "Explanation" of George Silverman presented a critique of the hypocritical devotions and charity of the Victorian Dissenters, even as Silverman ostensibly records fear and shame at his own besetting worldliness. The flagrant trespasses of the other characters are, in fact, a relief from Silverman's uncongenial inoffensiveness. As with the story of Esther, what begins as an interesting enough history of a homeless orphan who is only a spectator of good fortune, ends by sacrificing the romantic interest of that figure, typically always to be found watching from a dark ruined landscape, to a satirical interest in those contrasting figures, who are always to be seen cavorting in the warmth of the lighted windows.

may shift yet again, and, for example, Caddy Jellyby can become a character of psychological and romantic development with her own story.

Thus, Dickens has placed Esther's viewpoint alongside the "Condition of England" tone of the first two chapters; and it is the characteristics and development of Esther's narrative that will be followed through firstly, before going back to the features of the omniscient narrative, and finally, showing how the two come together. Having recognized and accepted the satirical purposes of Esther's narrative, we might ask why another viewpoint should have been felt necessary to the telling of the story, and why such a viewpoint out of all others. It is difficult to say whether Dickens felt that the voice of the first two chapters would have become merely a monolithically shrill fabular narrative, if left to gather impetus. Partly, it may have been a simple matter that when it was time to write another novel in 1851, he saw it as a useful way of organizing the necessary twenty monthly parts.

There is no clue in the letters written when he first began to think about the novel, as to which narrative took precedence in his mind. In the number plans, the third chapter, "A Progress," contains only the notes: "Esther Summerson./ Lady Dedlock's child." This seems to follow on naturally from the notes for the second chapter, which focus on Lady Dedlock and "Law Writer," and there is nothing to suggest that the third chapter would be written by, as well as about, this child. There is irony, of course,

in knowing so much about her through her own voice before knowing the most pertinent fact of her identity as it was first put down in the number plans. The interjection of the episodes from Esther's narrative slackens some of the tension of Lady Dedlock's story and draws attention back to the Chancery theme, of which she offers another, apparently unprejudiced, or at least non-political, viewpoint. It is not necessarily a more revealing or inward view, even though we know more mimetic details from Esther's narrative of, say, Richard's decline, than from the omniscient narrative, of Lady Dedlock's decline.

Nor is the format of Esther's narrative allegorical. Impressive a symbol as the Court of Chancery may be for the Condition of England, historical commentators have not been mistaken in assuming that Dickens, first of all, deplored the courts as a specific evil--they stand for themselves. On the other hand, Krook's lodging house is an allegorical representation of Chancery and the point is explicitly made as if Krook himself were rehearsing an elementary school lesson. After the description is given of the litter and rags of legal property which fill the shop, Krook says: "It's true enough...that they call me the Lord Chancellor, and call my shop Chancery. And why do you think they call me the Lord Chancellor, and my shop Chancery?" (BH, 50). Here, in Krook and his house, Dickens is able to reinforce the reader's impression of Chancery without repeating a description of the court setting itself: the potential comparison of the actual Court to a rag and



bone shop is reversed, and instead, the merely physical grimness of such a shop takes on a moral and intellectual dimension, and Esther's visit to it, an allegorical light.

But, generally, her encounters with such personages as Mrs. Jellyby, Harold Skimpole, and Mrs. Pardiggle exhibit the features and abuses of particular modes of thought and behaviour quite unallegorically, that is, without the intervention of symbol. Nor is Esther very much of an Everyman who learns in a progressive manner from symbolically arranged encounters; despite her habit of modest disclaimer, her criticism of Mrs. Jellyby's housekeeping, Mrs. Pardiggle's charity-mongering, or Skimpole's irresponsibility, is instinctive and immediate. Analogously, that John Jarndyce remarks the force of the east wind at the moments when Mrs. Jellyby or Mr. Skimpole are being discussed, is both a character trait of Jarndyce and a comment upon the topic also: the east wind which disturbs the cosiness of Bleak House being symbolic of those people or circumstances which disrupt the workings of English society. This has been well recognized, and with similar logic, so might the reactions of Esther be regarded less as psychological characteristics than as sociological judgments on her world.

Unlike those passages about Mrs. Jellyby or Mrs. Pardiggle, the reports of Skimpole's presence and conversation are rendered with humour and their own interest:

Well! So he had got on in life, and here he was! He was very fond of reading the papers, very fond of making fancy sketches with a pencil, very fond of nature, very fond of art. All he asked, of society was, to let him live. That wasn't much.

His wants were few. Give him the papers, conversation, music, mutton, coffee, landscape, fruit in the season, a few sheets of Bristol-board, and a little claret, and he asked no more. He was a mere child in the world, but he didn't cry for the moon. He said to the world, "Go your several ways in peace! Wear red coats, blue coats, lawn sleeves, put pens behind your ears, wear aprons; go after glory, holiness, commerce, trade, any object you prefer; only--let Harold Skimpole live!" (BH, 66)

That Skimpole is made to speak of himself in the third person makes this passage more satirical than allegorical --the details of this characterization do not, as in the itemization of the rags and bones in Krook's life, stand for anything other than "the papers" or "Bristol-board." Even if we should be aware of Skimpole's general resemblance to Leigh Hunt, we do not know for certain that the things listed are specifically referential, and what matters is not any one-to-one correspondence, but rather, that the narrative has adapted the viewpoint intrinsic to real life, where objects have an opaque and self-sufficient existence. We do not ask what "Bristol-board" represents in the order of Harold Skimpole's life.

Typically, Esther reports both her enjoyment of his conversation and her "confusion":

He was quite enchanting. If I felt at all confused at that early time, in endeavouring to reconcile anything he said with anything I had thought about the duties and accountabilities of life (which I am far from sure of), I was confused by not exactly understanding why he was free of them. (BH, 66)

Esther's "confusion" coincides with Mr. Jarndyce's "east wind," but her own conscientiousness as the housekeeper of

Bleak House makes the critical point strongly enough. While Skimpole discourses next morning at breakfast about his preference of the Drone to the Busy Bee--this would seem to be an illustrative conversation--Esther acts her part in the parable by hurrying off to begin her new housekeeping duties and Jarndyce retires to the "Growlery."

To reinforce the point, Esther's private charity is contrasted with the Pardiggle brand, and in answer to Mrs. Pardiggle's exhortations to administer publically to the poor, Esther is shown to reply:

That I was inexperienced in the art of adapting my mind to minds very differently situated, and addressing them from suitable points of view. That I had not that delicate knowledge of the heart which must be essential to such a work. That I had much to learn, myself, before I could teach others, and that I could not confide in my good intentions alone. For these reasons, I thought it best to be as useful as I could, and to render what kind services I could, to those immediately about me; and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself.  
(BH, 96)

In her connection with the Lady Dedlock history, Esther is the orphaned fairy-tale princess; in her own narrative, she points the argument of the satire. Esther's timidity in replying to Mrs. Pardiggle may be a psychological characteristic, but her expressed doubts about her qualifications as a do-gooder are a part of the didactic narrative purpose.

It is notable that at the beginning of the next chapter (Nine)--which is one of plot development rather than allegorical illustration--Esther prefaces:

I don't know how it is, I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think

about myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story again, I am really vexed and say, "Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature, I wish you wouldn't!" but it is all of no use. I hope any one who may read what I write, will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them, and can't be kept out.  
(BH,102-03)

This outburst is quite within the image formed of Esther's characterization but, considering all that has been seen of her function so far, one wonders if her denial of personal importance might not be, in fact, strictly accurate. In the last chapter of the fourth number, there is a contrast between the love story of Ada and Richard, which receives much earnest attention, and Mr. Guppy's lovesickness for Esther, which is a subject of ridicule. Similarly, her attraction to the young surgeon at the Bayham Badgers' is merely signalled: "He was rather reserved, but I thought him very sensible and agreeable. At least, Ada asked if I did not, and I said yes" (BH,163).

In the setting of the omniscient narrative she becomes romantically intriguing as the figure of the love-child, but within her own account, the fact that she is at the centre turns out to mean, paradoxically, that other characters are described with much more interest. It is not so much her as her world which figures prominently; naturally, as the housekeeper of Bleak House, she "can't be kept out."

These satiric purposes and observations continue to have their place, such that Richard, who is the attractive

romantic hero of this chapter, is also used to demonstrate the deficiencies of contemporary methods of schooling:

He had been eight years in a public school, and had learnt, I understood, to make Latin Verses of several sorts, in the most admirable manner. But I had never heard that it had been anybody's business to find out what his natural bent was, or where his failings lay, or to adapt any kind of knowledge to him.... [H]aving never had much chance of find out for himself what he was fitted for, and having never been guided to the discovery, he was taken by the newest idea, and was glad to get rid of the trouble of consideration, I wondered whether the Latin Verses often ended in this, or whether Richard's was a solitary case.  
(BH,151,152)

Again, "the Latin Verses" are a symbol of something more than themselves in the sense that they are representative of a whole system of thought; nonetheless, Esther speaks specifically here, for Latin verses were a precise feature of Victorian education as much as moral tracts, of institutionalized Victorian charity.

In this passage, curiously, it is Chancery which is the more generalized or symbolic reason for Richard's lack of direction; for Esther's thoughts above are intended to qualify Mr. Jarndyce's thesis that Chancery had

engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off--and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance--and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused. The character of much older and steadier people may be even changed by the circumstances surrounding them. It would be too much to expect that a boy's, in its formation, should be the subject of such influences, and escape them.  
(BH,151)

If the Court of Chancery is the chosen symbol in this book, of the muddled condition of England, then the progress of those in the Jarndyce case is an illustrative



history, with both didactic and romantic overtones. It is as part of this history that Richard and his career will indicate one of the typical stories that Chancery spawns. Undoubtedly, Dickens had heard of real-life cases where the direction of people's lives had been affected to an astonishing degree by the real court of Chancery and had therefore his story-telling sensibilities aroused by its possibilities as "Romance," as well as his social conscience.<sup>7</sup> But in these passages, it is Chancery which is the romantic generalization of the story--a government's inefficiencies seeming to become an individual's debilities --and the "Latin Verses" account which is the mark of detailed mimesis.

That is to say, the proposition that the Court of Chancery is of psychological and moral, as well as legal, detriment to the individual Englishman is the intellectual thesis of the novel, and the story of Richard, which otherwise might be that of a straightforward romantic hero, in becoming illustrative of this thesis, becomes allegorical, or didactically typical. But Esther's view as to the harm caused by an education devoted to Latin verse-making, while perhaps part of the overall thesis, is also specifically pointed satire with its own logic.

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<sup>7</sup> John Butt points out the number of Chancery histories cited in The Times throughout 1851 (Dickens at Work, pp. 183-87); and the story of Gridley, for instance, is known to have been derived from a pamphlet received from a lawyer after the appearance of the first number of Bleak House (Forster, Bk. 7, Chp. 1, p. 564; Dickens at Work, p. 184), and acknowledged in the preface to the novel.

In a similar way Richard's tentative choice of the medical profession may be used as the signal for a vigorous Boythornian comment on the government's administration of its surgeons: "the treatment of Surgeons aboard ship is such, that I would submit the legs--both legs--of every member of the Admiralty Board to a compound fracture, and render it a transportable offence in any qualified practitioner to set them, if the system were not wholly changed in eight-and-forty hours!" (BH,152). The point to be noted here is that Dickens has used both symbolic and satirical arguments in this chapter, working in episodes and examples from these different approaches, to produce a unified attack on an administrative system. It is unlikely that we will remember Boythorn's angry and rather extraneous comment unless we had read it as a thesis (as in a Household Words article) but we do retain the symbolic outline of Richard's progress which incorporates the Boythornian satire as well as other targets in its narratively organized argument.

Judgements about the misuse of power seem to lie behind the intellectual content of Dickens's satire or allegory: the suffering of characters always has a sociological basis--though, in the later novels, and particularly in their endings, a deeper moral culpability is also discerned. In characters where this interest in ~~moral development~~ moral development is predominant--David, Pip, Esther, Eugene Wrayburn, Arthur Clennam--the form of the novel

tends more towards romance, and when backed by a social or political dimension, to allegory.

In the journalism, the allegorical Idea tends to overshadow everything else; in the fiction, we are grateful for the extravagance of the descriptive detail, and the intrusion of one narrative form into another, whether of the romantic tale into the province of the sociological (the man from Shropshire) or, vice versa, of the satirical gem into the romantic hero's narrative (Richard). The first class are less successful, bathetic and contrived (think of the Strolling Actor story in Pickwick), perhaps attempting to elicit too much feeling out of an impoverished individuality; and the emotions evoked always having a didactic point being stage-managed for the hero and the reader. Such narratives tend to be unsuccessful allegory, as in the articles, where the romance formulas are summarized too neatly, instead of being recreated at length.

But in the second instance, the romance in being supplemented by satirical adventures (think of Richard's apprenticeship to Bayham Badger, Clennam's adventures with the Barnacles, Martin Chuzzlewit in America), is indulged with length, the length demanded by the institution of the serial novel, and it is precisely the aforementioned satirical digressions and details which sustain this required length. When the satire incorporates one subsuming allegorical idea, it may produce the sensation of a political dimension; when it "plays," using endless repetitions of the merely typical and incidental, it produces the

complementary half of that world--and by both is the novel "thickened" and given substantiality.

It is in this general section of the novel, around the fourth and fifth numbers, that Dickens's novel begins to acquire its famous density. The fourth number includes the beginnings of both that strain of inquiry which will precipitate Lady Dedlock's tragedy, and the foragings of Richard for a profession, which will finally eliminate every one but Chancery. Thus the two romances have begun the progress to their respective catastrophes, but the fifth number also inaugurates the crowding of the canvas, in the satirical vein. The sins of the parasites of the earth--Turveydrop, Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle et al.---are multiplied by further illustrations, and heightened by contrast to the Neckett children of the "Coavinses" sheriff's officer. Our indignation is invoked at the middle-class world of charity "where benevolence took spasmodic forms; where charity was assumed, as a regular uniform, by loud professors and speculators in cheap notoriety, vehement in profession, restless and vain in action" (BH,183). At the same time our pity is solicited by the depiction of these children, who live in the gloom of simple need rather than the glamour of professional charity. These two pictures, forming a contrast in the same chapter somehow come to define or symbolize the particular world which allows these very anomalies to co-exist.

This is only one juxtaposition. There is also an instructive contrast between the habitual passion of Boythorn

and the habitual indifference of Skimpole, and again, between the carelessness of Skimpole at making a living and the industriousness of the dead sheriff's officer, who is singled out as having been conscientious for the sake of his family, in a disagreeable and difficult duty. As Mr. Jarndyce points out:

If we make such men necessary by our faults and follies, or by our want of worldly knowledge, or by our misfortunes, we must not revenge ourselves upon them. There was no harm in his trade. He maintained his children....He might have done worse. He might have undertaken to do it, and not done it.  
(BH, 186, 187)

The type of Harold Skimpole is both the contrast to, and raison d'être of this man's occupation, and it is Skimpole himself who puts forward a satirical description of their interdependence.

In this speech Dickens brings together all the features of his fictional world which in this chapter have served to give it the cogency and substantiality of the real world. But he does so in a satirical manner, a manner which somehow carries the emphatic weight of anger such as would be aroused by the real world, and yet simultaneously flattens his own fictional world. In fact, it has a greater resemblance to Dickens's journalistic writings, writing which is meant to arouse very real indignation, by means of a rather prancing shorthand manner often making use of very crude fabular allusions. Thus, Gridley's involvement with Chancery:

Here was this Mr. Gridley, a man of a robust will, and surprising energy--intellectually speaking, a sort of inharmonious blacksmith--and he [Skimpole]



could easily imagine that there Gridley was, years ago, wandering about in life for something to expend his superfluous combativeness upon--a sort of Young Love among the thorns--when the Court of Chancery came in his way, and accommodated him with the exact thing he wanted. There they were, matched, ever afterwards! Otherwise he might have been a great general, blowing up all sorts of towns, or he might have been a great politician, dealing in all sorts of parliamentary rhetoric; but, as it was, he and the Court of Chancery had fallen upon each other in the pleasantest way, and nobody was much the worse, and Gridley was, so to speak, from that hour provided for.  
(BH,194-95)

Or Skimpole's "patronage" of "Coavinses":

He, Mr. Skimpole, himself, had sometimes repined at the existence of Coavinses. He had found Coavinses in his way. He could have dispensed with Coavinses. There had been times when, if he had been a Sultan, and his Grand Vizier had said one morning, "What does the Commander of the Faithful require at the hands of his slave?" he might have even gone so far as to reply, "The head of Coavinses!" But what turned out to be the case? That, all that time, he had been giving employment to a most deserving man; that he had been a benefactor to Coavinses; that he had actually been enabling Coavinses to bring up these charming children in this agreeable way, developing these social virtues!  
(BH,195)

This is comparable to the facetious prose of some of the satirical pieces which Dickens was continually writing during the 1850s. Such prose is neither as effective or as memorable as most of Dickens's fictional work, and the difference is indeed well demonstrated in this chapter in the contrast between the lesser effectiveness of the Skimpole passage and that of the actual visit to Bell Yard.

While Skimpole's prattle is entertaining, it has none of the detail and suspense of Esther's account of climbing the stair to the Neckett flat, the children's description

of their father's death and their present life, Mrs. Blinder's account of what the neighbours did to help them, and Mr. Gridley's history as "the man from Shropshire." Whether or not Dickens actually witnessed such narratives, his ear has correctly judged the interest they bear for his reader, and he has set them down with the cogency of a real experience: at the entrance, Mrs. Blinder gives them the key to the flat, Mrs. Gridley interrupts them on the stair up to it, Charlotte comes running into the room and tells her story, Mrs. Blinder follows the visitors up the stair and adds her few words, Mrs. Blinder running out of breath, Mr. Gridley appears, to play with the children and rage at Chancery, and finally, Skimpole and his speech wind up the adventure. Except for Skimpole, each story-teller in this passage has also simultaneously acted out his part in the little action--the pathetic mites, the good-natured dame, the fierce old man--all are part of one action, one implied life.

Esther is both participant and narrator in all of this, and the satirical idea and the sympathetic emotion are organically integral to one another throughout. It is probably at this point in both narratives that readers have formed the "idea" of Bleak House by which it is known, for the world of the novel is precisely its idea.

The plot "thickens" again, in yet another way, in the eighteenth chapter. This is a significant crux in the novel: it is here that Esther travels from Bleak House, the territory symbolic of her narrative, to Chesney Wold, the narrative territory of Lady Dedlock's story. The

preceding chapter has already begun a narrative section which is predominantly romantic in nature, concerning the progress of the relationships between Richard and Ada, and Esther and Allan Woodcourt. The match of the Chancery cousins and especially of Esther and Woodcourt, seems very formulaic, and one feels that the narrative energy is really to be found elsewhere in the story, in the Chancery satire or Lady Dedlock's story.

Thus in the next chapter, the sedate pace of Esther's sojourn in the country is wound up into the vortex of the Chesney Wold drama when she first sets eyes on Lady Dedlock. The pastoral descriptions of the country estate and rustic church are interrupted--

Shall I ever forget the rapid beating at my heart, occasioned by the look I met, as I stood up! Shall I ever forget the manner in which those handsome proud eyes seemed to spring out of their langour, and to hold mine!...And yet I - I, little Esther Summerson, the child who lived a life apart, and on whose birthday there was no rejoicing--seemed to arise before my own eyes, evoked out of the past by some power in this fashionable lady, whom I not only entertained no fancy that I had ever seen, but whom I perfectly well knew I had never seen until that hour.  
(BH, 224, 225)

It is notable that the encounter should recall to Esther's narrative, not only her past, but also some of the fairy-tale-like references which characterized the first description of Esther's earliest years, and which are associated with Lady Dedlock throughout.

This use of such references is very different from their shorthand invocation in the satirical parts of the book such

as Skimpole's speech above; here, they are given the expansion and emphasis by which to evoke desire and attraction towards the characters associated with them, as in a fairy tale. Their use here is directed towards the arousal of emotional expectations, rather than of moral imperatives or pedagogical interests; they are placed in the context of romance rather than parable. Esther is once more "the child who lived a life apart," the person of mysterious disgrace and obscure birth rather than the domestic exemplum or transparent observer. Perhaps, in the conduct of a critical argument, this might seem contradictory, but this sort of complexity in character is of course absolutely traditional in the novel. The question whether Esther satisfies us more in this romantic identity than she does in her satiric role, or whether one is truer than another to Dickens's intentions and the requirements of the plot becomes impossible even to ask, for the use of one perspective only would have produced something less than a novel.

The movement in the narrative which brought Esther into Lady Dedlock's world continues through the next few numbers, culminating in Lady Dedlock's recognition of Esther as her child and the relation between them. Moreover, characters such as Mr. George and Bucket now move commonly between the reports of the two narratives, in the catch-all setting of London. In these sections we gradually see that Mr. George is both the military fencing companion of Richard and the long-lost son of the housekeeper

on the Dedlock estate, as well as the final refuge of Mr. Gridley; Bucket is the tracker of Mr. Gridley, and of Lady Dedlock's and Captain Hawdon's secret, under Tulkinghorn's direction. Mr. Guppy, a law clerk at Kenge and Carboy, aspires to be a miniature Tulkinghorn and has many of the threads of Esther's case and of the novel in his file. He fancies himself as a suitor of Esther, and he is also friendly with two law clerks, Mr. Jobling and Young Smallweed, the first of whom lives in Captain Hawdon's old room and expects to find his letters, and the latter, who happens to be part of the household where the little girl Charley, later Esther's maid, is a drudge and where Mr. George has borrowed money. Guppy naturally knows of the law stationer, Mr. Snagsby (though he does not know of his relation to Hawdon) and hearing Snagsby's name mentioned by Jo during a street incident, Guppy takes the boy along to the stationer's shop; there, he meets the Chadbands, Mrs. Chadband turning out to be Mrs. Rachel, the former servant of Esther's godmother, and therefore acquainted with Kenge and Carboy. To Guppy she will eventually reveal that Esther's last name is Hawdon, and Jo tells them about a lady who appeared to have an unnatural interest in Hawdon. Snagsby finally goes to Tulkinghorn with this information and Guppy, to Lady Dedlock. Thus in these few chapters, all clustered in the seventh, eighth, and ninth numbers, the number of characters and revealed interconnections accelerates quite bewilderingly.



Jo is indirectly a type of go-between in the two narratives. Esther's encounter with Jo in his illness (Chapter Thirty-One) marks the occasion of another sharp satirical examination of Society's attitude toward the poor, but the depiction of Jo's illness as a phenomenon reflecting on society's callousness also becomes a development of Esther's personal story, when she catches his disease: the reader's moral indignation over Jo's case is subsumed by the arousal of fears for the heroine of this narrative. Thus Jo occasions the shift of the satirical narrative into the level of the romance; Esther is associated by him with Lady Dedlock, and subsequently the events of her life take on the rather romantic patterning and quality of the Chesney Wold narrative.

Nonetheless, although Dickens has as usual described the delirious state very interestingly in relating some of Esther's dreams during her illness, the latter cannot be said to be the same sort of story material which makes up Lady Dedlock's narrative, for it is the disagreeableness of a sickroom, not the aura of a possible deathbed which is evoked. Esther's account culminates with the words: "Perhaps the less I say of these sick experiences, the less tedious and the more intelligible I shall be. I do not recall them to make others unhappy, or because I am now the least unhappy in remembering them. It may be that if we knew more of such strange afflictions, we might be the better able to alleviate their intensity" (BH, 432). A truly documentary attitude!

Thus, her small episode is summarized and we are once again back into the saga of Chancery: news of Richard's decline and a visit from Miss Flite. Miss Flite comes to tell the story of her family history and decline in Chancery, and to point its relevance to Richard's state, "the said meaning, so sadly illustrated in her poor pinched form, that made its way through all her incoherence" (BH, 441). However, the encounter with Miss Flite is not unmixed in its symbolism: her incoherence reveals the wreck of Chancery, but also hints at the identity of Lady Dedlock as the mysterious lady who is reported to have taken Esther's handkerchief from the mother of the dead infant:

--she's the Lord Chancellor's wife. He's married, you know. And I understand she leads him a terrible life. Throws his lordship's papers into the fire, my dear, if he won't pay the jeweller!  
(BH, 439)

Here, Miss Flite in her muddle of fancies brings together some of the things mentioned in the first two chapters of the novel, "In Chancery" and "In Fashion," and indirectly expresses some of the reader's dim sense of how the glittering upper class leaders of England and the Chancery underworld are connected. This short speech, as much as the account of Esther's dreams, exemplifies Dickens's intuitive sense of the "logic" by which stories grow: in Miss Flite's attempt to find explanations of a secret, her incoherence very quickly escalates into an elementary glamorous narrative. Just as Esther's dreams seize upon a familiar image and coin it anew in a narrative action, so the format of Miss Flite's explanation conveys the confusion

of the country about Chancery, in a homely domestic action which does not even obviously refer to the grammar of symbols used in the novel so far. Rather, she speaks of the Lord Chancellor's papers and a woman's jewellery in a totally mimetic way, giving the sense of denoting nothing but themselves, much in the way that fairy tales do--the reader can picture the whole incident in an instant and feel all the primeval expectations or emotions generally aroused in the course of simple stories.

It is this power to suggest narrative so easily for the reader, that awes us about Dickens's skill in this minute instance. Only afterwards do we wonder what an evil-stepmother-like figure has to do with a judge of property-law, and recall that Miss Flite is supposed to be describing a woman who has merely made off with Esther's handkerchief; we become confused again about where this places us in Esther's narrative, and are forced to remark in the light of "sense" once more, that Miss Flite surely is illogical. The essential feature that possibly has enabled us to go along thus far with this account has been the reader's knowledge that this unnamed woman is Lady Dedlock, part of the fashionable world which is first introduced as being "wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton" (BH, 11)--the two narratives, as shown above, have begun to move towards one another, and this movement is evidenced in miniature, in the "logical" associations of this small narrative.

Altogether, between the fable and history suggested by Miss Flite's "poor pinched form," the gem of a tale above,

and finally, her story of the heroic Woodcourt, this chapter becomes a regular cluster of thumbnail narratives.

Miss Flite's "physician tale" turns out to consist of:

An awful scene. Death in all shapes. Hundreds of dead and dying. Fire, storm, and darkness. Numbers of the drowning thrown upon a rock. There, and through it all, my dear physician was a hero. Calm and brave, through everything. Saved many lives, never complained in hunger and thirst, wrapped naked people in his spare clothes, took the lead, showed them what to do, governed them, tended the sick, buried the dead, and brought the poor survivors safely off at last! My dear, the poor emaciated creatures all but worshipped him. They fell down at his feet, when they got to the land, and blessed him. The whole country rings with it.  
(BH, 442)

As with all the previous features of the Esther-Woodcourt story, Dickens seems more inclined towards synopsis than dramatization; it is not a remarkable love story, nor does Dickens bother to make it so--indeed, the pair seem to be moral exempla rather than desperate lovers. Esther may be impressed by the romance of what she has just heard, but she quickly prepares to renounce her secret affection.

Romance, desperation, and exotic sensibility are all in the past with Lady Dedlock, and Common Sense governs her daughter's affections; truly, this is no psychological portrait, for the inner desires of Esther consistently conform themselves to the public life.

Even the revelation, first, of her changed looks, and secondly, of her mother's identity, are immediately followed by her thankful realization that her illness will effectively be a blessing to her tormented mother:

--when I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I could never disgrace her by any trace of likeness.  
(BH, 449)

Lady Dedlock prostrates and indulges herself in her emotion of the encounter, while Esther invokes this inverted vanity: the melodrama of the Dedlock narrative and the realism of Esther's are rather neatly contrasted. The scene is moving to the reader as one feels the horror of Lady Dedlock's situation, but any terror that Esther afterwards feels as the living accusation of her mother is calmly told, not dramatized, for Esther's domestic comforts are never far from her consciousness and we have no sense that the years since her birth have been quite as unhappy as for her mother.

The two different consciousnesses of mother and daughter express neatly the differences in the two narratives: the depths beneath Lady Dedlock's composure are constantly hinted at in the omniscient narrative, and the gaps between surface and reality comprise much of its tension; Esther's report of her world exhibits a harmonizing tendency, almost Skimpole-like, which can handle a diversity of phenomena whose only constant tone is one of tentativeness in speaking of all its diverse phenomena.

It is curious, that while the two narratives continue to intersect each other in approximately equal proportions, Lady Dedlock's fate seems to accelerate relentlessly after the interview with Esther, and Esther's narrative, consisting mainly of Richard's decline, gives the sense of taking place



over a long period of time. There is an amusing description of life at the Turveydrop dancing academy, where Esther spends an odd hour in dancing, and later, taking tea with Guppy, where she reassures him in legal language that she has no intention of pressing him to make good his former offer of marriage. One duly notes the faults and foibles of these characters, keeping in mind the broad moral categories of the narrative, but the chapter does nothing so much as evoke the sense of time passing--not as George Eliot renders it, by summary and analysis of trends, so much as by the celebration of life improvised in the present--perhaps to the greater confusion of the reader, who is directed about from one peripheral experience to another, rather than through a logical sequence of feeling and thought proceeding to a single crescendo.

## ii

Esther's nature is set: she is the antithesis to Mrs. Jellyby and Skimpole, and her responsibilities are her compensation for being the unhappy little girl, and daughter of Lady Dedlock. After her meeting with her mother, the most signal aspect of her translation into a romantic character is her involvement in the hunt for Tulkinghorn's murderer. In the fifty-seventh chapter, after a series of chapters in the omniscient narrative showing Bucket in pursuit of Lady Dedlock, Esther's narrative takes up reference to all that has passed. The action from here on is virtually sheer plot tension as Esther races time to find

her mother alive and to become the wife of Allan Woodcourt --all the expectations and gratifications that come together in romance. But then there are indications that Dickens conceives of Lady Dedlock's story as the novel's main repository of romance.

The first portrait (as well as the last) of Lady Dedlock is set out with all the precision of a stage setting and significance of gesture that generally denotes sensationalistic drama: she is the epitome of the figure of melodrama where all emotion runs beneath words and only shows forth in gestures such as the furtive eager look at the handwriting of the law papers on the table. The third chapter of the book, "The Ghost's Walk," builds up the feeling about Chesney Wold as a romantic place where the passions and the supernatural have shaped life in the past. The theme of the first paragraphs is the possibilities of "fancy" among its residents, culminating in Mrs. Rouncewell's recital of the unhappy fate of an earlier Lady Dedlock who is said to haunt these regions.

But Chesney Wold is also a setting for the amusements of the upper classes and a satirical arena for the omniscient narrator:

Then there is my Lord Boodle, of considerable reputation with his party, who has known what office is, and who tells Sir Leicester Dedlock with much gravity, after dinner, that he really does not see to what the present age is tending. A debate is not what a debate used to be; the House is not what the House used to be; even a Cabinet is not what it formerly was. He perceives with astonishment, that supposing the present Government to be overthrown, the limited choice

of the Crown in the formation of a new Ministry, would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle --supposing it would be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle, which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the Leadership of the House of Common to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can't offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can't put him in the Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock), because you can [sic] provide for Noodle!  
(BH,145)

This is the prancing of the journalism again and could almost have been lifted straight out of articles such as "Cheap Patriotism" (Household Words, 9 June 1855) or "Why?" (Household Words, 1 March 1856). It is as if Dickens had written an article in place of this chapter, which might have been entitled "Dandyism" and opened by the topic paragraph:

Dandyism? There is no King George the Fourth now (more's the pity!) to set the dandy fashion; there are no clear-starched, jack-towel neckcloths, no short-waisted coats, no false calves, no stays. There are no caricatures, now, of effeminate Exquisites so arrayed, swooning in opera-boxes with excess of delight, and being revived by other dainty creatures, poking long-necked scent-bottles at their noses....But is there Dandyism in the brilliant and distinguished circle notwithstanding, Dandyism of a more mischievous sort, that has got below the surface and is doing less harmless things than jack-towelling itself and stopping its own digestion, to which no rational person need particularly object?  
(BH,144)

Both allegory and satire in this novel strive to make an overall didactic point about the state of England--for example, the presentations of Krook's house and Chancery

contribute to the same thesis--but a passage such as the one above is largely satirical in its method because its relationships are defined by Victorian England, not generated from any self-sufficient symbolism.

And yet this is not English society as Trollope might have reported it, nor would such passages have been possible in Esther's narrative, except in the conversation of Harold Skimpole: the whole is a thesis-ridden parody, rather than a description of Socratic elicitation. It conjoins objects and references from daily usage in a surreal metaphorical logic. The idea of Dandyism and its evils has subsumed the physical description of these characters, and therefore overturned any Trollopian equilibrium--thus, Dickens's satire, in using the nominatives of the real world presented in this unreal order, seeks to convince the reader of his thesis about the government of England. In the discrepancy between our normal use of these terms and the use of them in such a passage, lies Dickens's "meaning." His purpose is not to direct us to a study of his imagery, some elaborate system of symbolism or exquisite allegory about Lords Coodle and Doodle, but to the Victorian England which it represents, and yet he has chosen fiction as the medium in which to represent this problem.

Perhaps, more notably, the question is not that he should choose to bring such things as contemporary political problems into a novel, but that in his journalism (where it is certainly not expected) he often chooses to use

narrative and fantasy to conduct his discussion, as if the telling of a story were a way of thinking out a problem. The difference between writing this way in novels and in articles, is that in the novel Dickens attempts to integrate this satiric strain of didacticism into an independent symbolism, an artistically self-sustaining entity, of which the opening paragraphs of Bleak House are an example. But can we say that he truly succeeds?

We have seen how Esther's narrative only succeeds in building up--and the process is cumulative rather than emblematic--an integrated picture of English society, through the simple strategy of forcing us to view all these disparate phenomena through a single viewpoint, the phenomena then seeming to become a Society. Esther's view of the actual workings of Chancery is reported from a distance as far off as any journalist's or that of any article that might have appeared in Household Words. However, as well as the society of Mrs. Jellyby et al., her circle of acquaintance and knowledge includes Richard, and his story is rendered by Esther in much more symbolic terms. The thesis of both the satirical and the symbolic episodes is that Chancery is ruinous to the English citizen, but in Richard's case it has become a narrative, is argued through a sequence of events, and it is symbolism which effects this.

Otherwise, Esther's circle of acquaintance is a mimetic representation of a society which is only integrated under the title of "England"; and Esther herself is,



not so implicitly, the standard against which these people are set. The formal or artistic decision to use her life as a chronologically organized viewpoint for a study of disparate elements is matched by her role as a moral measuring rule organizing these elements hierarchically. Thus the sequence of her story develops a vertical dimension.

But is this true of the omniscient narrative? Why or how does Lady Dedlock's personal progress lead into this satire? Because her tragedy, the melodrama of her story, is constructed on the gap between the dignity of the society whose impassivity she so well reflects and the intensity of the emotions within. In her narrative, it is seen in the temporal gap between her resplendent present and her humiliating past. In the social strata of the novel, it comes in the gap between Chesney Wold and Krook's Chancery where her former lover lodges.

Krook's Chancery refers back to the Chancery where the "Dandyism" noted at Chesney Wold is the ruling logic of the day; the observers feared by Lady Dedlock, most notably, Tulkinghorn, are the administrators of this system--thus it is fitting that Lady Dedlock's enemy should be a lawyer. The end of the chapter "On the Watch" recognizes this:

Lady Dedlock is always the same exhausted deity, surrounded by worshippers, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine. Mr. Tulkinghorn is always the same speechless repository of noble confidences; so oddly out of place, and yet so perfectly at home. They appear to take as little note of one another, as any two people, enclosed within the same walls, could. But, whether each evermore watches and suspects the other, evermore mistrustful of some great reservation; whether each is evermore prepared at all points for the other, and never to be taken unawares;

what each would give to know how much the other knows--all this is hidden, for the time, in their own hearts.  
(BH,150)

Their superficial social relationship, its very opacity, is part of the terror and drama of their relationship in Lady Dedlock's romance: Tulkinghorn's social realism, his mundane existence as a lawyer in the Chancery becomes one of his attributes in his role as the dragon or evil spirit of the story, and the conventional upper class world, a black forest through which the heroine, preternaturally alert, must perpetually negotiate her way, in a manner that is not true of Esther in her world. To carry out the forms, at a time when all inner life threatens to reduce one to prostration and chaos, becomes the daunting task of Lady Dedlock's life. This is melodrama: the suggestion of emotional depths below conventional surfaces, and mere social mannerisms translated into the portents of a significant force.

The interconnections between the various levels of action are more than ever evident, in the next chapter of the omniscient narrative ("Tom-All-Alone's"), where imperfectly disguised as her own maid, and sneaking past Tulkinghorn's window and the symbolically accusing finger of Allegory, Lady Dedlock indulges her appetite for details of her former lover's life and death, by inducing Jo to show her Snagsby's shop, Krook's house, and the place of burial; later, the same evening this same woman is out on society's rounds. The chapter is, besides a passage

in her story, a sober outline of Jo's life:

What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard step? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!  
(BH,197)

They are, of course, brought together in the person of Lady Dedlock herself, whose present glory covers a tormented past.

Jo, her guide in these quarters, is a victim of the same society. His anonymity coincides with Lady Dedlock's secrecy about this aspect of her life; but this anonymity further takes on notoriety in Dickens's satire, as an instance of the same negligence of the ruling classes. Tom-all-Alone's is as much a representation of the social system of the upper classes as Chesney Wold:

these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years--though born expressly to do it.  
(BH,197)

Perhaps no other chapter evinces more completely the amalgam of narratives in this book. There is the romance of Lady Dedlock's story, heightened by realistically detailed description of her lover's former surroundings, which somehow shades, finally, into the satire of Doodle

and Foodle--thus, the merely authentic is never far from the stridently didactic.

The description of the imagined mental state of Jo--its feeling of confused exclusion which is generated by his illiteracy and the resemblance of his inner consciousness to that of a dumb brute--culminates in the admonition of the danger of such a being and many others like him to his society. Dickens exploited this approach, years later, at greater length, in the opening pages of George Silverman's Explanation. Contrary to what the modern reader might expect, in neither instance does it generate unique psychological insights; instead, Dickens uses it to produce sociological insights typifying a class. It becomes knowledge, and socially useful knowledge, of an imperative mood. The report of a social phenomenon, even in its documentary purity, mingles smoothly with narratives of a romantic and satirical character. Dickens may describe Jo merely making his way through the streets--but then have him sit on the step of "the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" (BH,198)--"he has no idea, poor wretch, of the spiritual destitution of a coral reef in the Pacific, or what it costs to look up the precious souls among the cocoa-nuts and bread-fruit" (BH,199). The meanest action of poor Jo thus feeds grist to Dickens's satirical mill.

Jo, standing before Chadband and Guppy, the professional humbugs of Religion and Law, is not unlike Pip before Pumblechook, Wopsle, and Hubble at Christmas dinner--the

specimen Boy:

For what are you, my young friend? Are you a beast of the field? No. A bird of the air? No. A fish of the sea or river? No. You are a human boy, my young friend. A human boy. O glorious to be a human boy! And why glorious, my young friend? Because you are capable of receiving the lessons of wisdom, because you are capable of profiting by this discourse, which I now deliver for your good, because you are not a stick, or a staff, or a stock, or a stone, or a post, or a pillar.

O running stream of sparkling joy  
To be a soaring human boy!  
(BH, 242)

Dickens's satire here has become word-play, fantasy. That the institutions of Victorian law and religion were ineffectual in dealing with the problems of Jo and his like, we can be told: that they are, we can actively experience in a passage filled with its irrelevant verbiage.

The manners of the working class at the inquest into Hawdon's ignominious death, in the chapter "Our Dear Brother," similarly hide the depths of life spent in poverty, and the brief appearance of Jo again reinforces this point; but the tone overall is mellower, and Dickens's interest in the amusements of the working class seems unmixed:

In the zenith of the evening, Little Swills says, Gentlemen, if you'll permit me, I'll attempt a short description of a scene or real life that came off here to-day. Is much applauded and encouraged; goes out of the room as Swills; comes in as the Coroner (not the least in the world like him); describes the Inquest, with recreative intervals of piano-forte accompaniment to the refrain--With his (the Coroner's) tippy tol li doll, tippy tol lo doll, tippy tol li doll, Dee!  
(BH, 136)

Here we see that the lighter touches of Dickens's genius



for observation survive in the nooks and crannies of his darker motifs, and that his satiric treatment of manners can function without didacticism.

Such passages serve no purpose in the development of the plot, nor are they really of the same tenor as the "condition of England" satire. Indeed, in the burlesqued procedure of the beer-and-skittles Inquest, the testimony of Mrs. Piper presses in the tendency of some modern prose, prefaced as it is by the description of her speech as being "chiefly in parentheses and without punctuation":

Mrs. Piper lives in the court (which her husband is a cabinet-maker), and its has long been well bekown among the neighbours(counting from the day next but one before the half-baptising of Alexander James Piper aged eighteen months and four days old on accounts of not being expected to live such was the sufferings gentlemen of that child in his gums) as the Plaintive--so Mrs. Piper insists on calling the deceased--was reported to have sold himself....On accounts of this and his dark looks has often dreamed as she see him take a pick-axe from his pocket and split Johnny's head (which the child knows not fear and has repeatually called after him close at his eels). Never however see the Plaintive take a pick-axe or any other wepping far from it.  
(BH,133,134)

In the same mode, we are treated to a local night at the Sol's Arms of the "Harmonic Meeting" and entertainment by "Little Swills, the Comic Vocalist" (BH,136). None of this is apparently necessary to the story; all of it is amusing to the reader who has as much inclination as Dickens to "play." The whole point or feeling is lost if these passages are not quoted at length.

The two chapters following the Chadbandian exercise in the seventh number reiterate this effect, with the

smart-man-about-town talk between Guppy, Smallweed, and Jobling. Again, not only does the narrative fill up with more and more names, and characters, but its progress almost comes to a halt in this thicket of the Dickens world. We are taken through all the courses of the young clerks' dinner, even to the reckoning:

Four veals and hams is three, and four potatoes is three and four, and one summer cabbage is three and six, and three marrows is four and six, and six breads is five, and three Cheshires is five and three, and four pints of half-and-half is six and three, and four small rums is eight and three, and three Pollys is eight and six. Eight and six in half a sovereign, Polly, and eighteenpence out!  
(BH,253)

This is wholly derivative in an obvious sense and, yet, following the progression of a dinner, it is the natural dramatic culmination of this scene, in the oral poetry of the lower middle classes. Its secondhand romantic sensibilities are perfectly expressed in Guppy's impersonation of the "man of feeling" when refusing to talk about his suit with Esther: "there are chords in the human mind--" (BH,246).

These passages and the Chadbandian periods comprise some of Dickens's most playful writing, and yet however seemingly fantastic, they are fundamentally satirical, that is, based on empirical manners. The difference we feel, perhaps, from earlier satirical writing, is the apparent absence of an intellectual point coinciding with the rhetorical point; we may ultimately form some judgement about Guppy and his way of life, such as the emotional and moral inferiority of the legal world, but that does not

forestall our present amusement at his amusements. The insistent edge found in the report of upper class amusements is missing, for the shortcomings of these people are viewed as far from evil, that is, as producing hardship for others --they have no social consequences.

The fictional world of the novel is also thickened, though very differently, by the introduction of another minor character, the detective Bucket. His mission, mysteriously initiated by Tulkinghorn, brings in Mr. Snagsby with news of Jo's story of the woman who gave him the gold coin, and Jenny, the woman visited earlier by Mrs. Pardiggle in St. Albans, and who knows Jo; Hortense the maid also plays some mysterious part in this, not the less ominous when she offers her services to Esther. We begin to have the sense of things as they seem to Cook's Court:

For Tom-all-Alone's and Lincoln's Inn Fields persist in harnessing themselves, a pair of ungovernable coursers, to the chariot of Mr. Snagsby's imagination; and Mr. Bucket drives; and the passengers are Jo and Mr. Tulkinghorn; and the complete equipage whirls through the Law Stationery business at wild speed, all round the clock.

.....  
Mrs. Snagsby is so perpetually on the alert, that the house becomes ghostly with creaking boards and rustling garments. The 'prentices think somebody may have been murdered there, in bygone times. Guster holds certain loose atom of an idea (picked up at Tooting, where they were found floating among the orphans), that there is buried money underneath the cellar, guarded by an old man with a white beard, who cannot get out for seven thousand years, because he said the Lord's Prayer backwards.  
(BH, 315, 317)

During these few chapters the plot meanders through the periphery of the characters' lives, spawning stories,

dreams, suspicions; the novel becomes particularly "cluttered" at this point, with diverse personalities and perspectives on the main action.

Smallweed and Mr. George clash in Tulkinghorn's push to uncover the secret of Captain Hawdon's relation to Lady Dedlock: for besides Tulkinghorn's motives, we must keep in mind that Smallweed is interested in Hawdon as an unpaid debtor, and George, in him as a former comrade in arms.

Bucket searches for Hawdon; he also keeps an eye out for Gridley. George will later be the nurse of Jo also; meanwhile the boy is shown kindness by Snagsby, who helped Hawdon while he was alive.

Jo has told Snagsby about the woman looking for Hawdon's grave (for Jo was shown charity by Hawdon himself), and the Chadbands have also told Snagsby about a Miss Esther Summerson and her aunt.

Chadband's wife was her former nurse and has also told this to Guppy, who is the suitor after Esther's hand and a legal clerk in the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and he makes it his business to prove that Captain Hawdon was Esther's father. In order to advance his suit, Guppy brings all this to the attention of Lady Dedlock--and then we are back again at Tulkinghorn.

No wonder all this goes round and round in the brain of Snagsby--who once hired Hawdon to do legal copy-work for Tulkinghorn, becomes acquainted with Mr. Guppy when the latter brings Jo around, kept an eye out for Jo, searches with Mr. Bucket for the boy and defends him from Mr. Chadband.

At least Snagsby, unlike the reader, does not also have to keep straight the names of "Quebec," "Malta," and "Young Woolwich," the offspring of Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet, or all the cousins of Sir Leicester Dedlock!

Even the climax of the death of Krook (Chapter Thirty-Two) seems to be happened upon in amidst the idle chat of Snagsby on his after-dinner stroll (commenting to Guppy on the mysterious death of Hawdon--"Seems a Fate in it, don't there?" (BH,395)), the confabulations of Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins after the children have been put to bed, and the strains of the Harmonic Meeting performance by Little Swills and Miss M. Melvilleson, as well as the whisperings of Guppy and Jobling, as they wait for twelve o'clock to strike. Afterwards, the interest which the event arouses and the conversation engendered in the court make the death seem to the court as "a little money left it unexpectedly" (BH,405), and the effort of the chapter is the spending of this currency in the conduct of another inquest. Dickens, in the very process of commenting on the wordiness of this procedure, loads up his own narrative in the same way:

Now do they show (in as many words as possible), how during some hours of yesterday evening a very peculiar smell was observed by the inhabitants of the court in which the tragical occurrence which forms the subject of that present account transpired; and which odour was at one time so powerful, that Mr. Swills, a comic vocalist, professionally engaged by Mr. J.G. Bogsby, has himself stated to our reporter that he mentioned to Miss M. Melvilleson, a lady of some pretensions to musical ability, likewise engaged by Mr. J.G. Bogsby to sing a series of concerts called Harmonic Assemblies or Meetings, which it would appear are held at the Sol's Arms, under Mr. Bogsby's direction,



pursuant to the Act of George the Second, that he (Mr. Swills) found his voice seriously affected by the impure state of the atmosphere; his jocose expression at the time, being, "that he was like an empty post-office, for he hadn't a single note in him."  
(BH,404)

A single sentence which seems bent on summoning forth all the collective irrelevancies of the event!

By an appropriate coincidence, Smallweed turns out to be the brother-in-law of Krook, and he soon moves in, to continue Krook's mad search for the "open sesame" to the Hidden Treasure of the Chancery, and making the place "a well or grave of waste-paper" (BH,492). Guppy, whose own plundering in this symbolical House of Chancery has yielded only ashes and a little oil, spends his leisure time after Krook's death watching both this and the mad futility inherent in the sight of Richard Carstone coming from his paper-producing interviews with Vholes.

But with the appearance of Richard, the novel has obviously moved from its satirical play on manners to an allegorical mode. In amongst the passages showing the life of Cook's Court, the death of Krook is described in emblematic terms:

The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name Your Highness will, attribute to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally--inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only--Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died.  
(BH,403)

This is typical of the type of narrative by which Dickens moves to all the crises and resolutions of the novel's romantic stories. As Mr. Vholes in his very person confronts Richard with the evidence of his hopeless future, so Tulkinghorn in his legal drama finally gives Lady Dedlock the sign that her long-dreaded fate is fast approaching. The climax of Richard's involvement with Vholes may symbolize a typical crisis in tales of Chancery, but the climax of the tale of Lady Dedlock differs in being purely of a romantic sort; and her connection with Sir Leicester and the Coodle-Doodle satire seems more than ever an arranged marriage. Although the Roman figure on Tulkinghorn's ceiling is self-consciously called "Allegory," it has always pointed simply to developments in the plot: to Lady Dedlock, passing by the window to visit her former lover's grave, to Jo pointing out the grave, and finally, to the crumb for the detective story, the murder of Tulkinghorn.

The story of Jo's life and death is, in fact, more nearly allegorical than "Allegory": it is the Descent section of the novel. Only in the last moments of his life is there any approach to a "comic" ending, and then it is only the promise of another world which makes possible an ascent at all. The world of Tom-all-Alone's, and by implication, throughout this novel, the world which rules and sustains it, are entirely infernal:

The moon has eyed Tom with a dull cold stare, as admitting some puny emulation of herself in his desert region unfit for life and blasted by volcanic fires; but she has passed on, and is gone. The blackest nightmare in the infernal stables grazes on Tom-all-Alone's, and Tom is

fast asleep....There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high.  
(BH,551,553)

The exhortations of the society and its laws to those of such an existence to "Move On" lead ultimately, as in Jo's case, to the graveyard, and Jo's fate is both a part and an illustration of the downward movement of the society itself. It is Allan Woodcourt, the practical Christian, who is able to guide Jo "up out of Tom-all-Alone's into the broad rays of the sunlight and the purer air" (BH,560) and, later, towards the Heavenly ascent: thus, he is not only a romantic hero but also a figure illustrative of the type of sensitive charity and knowledgeable reform which Dickens sees as the best antidote to such a "growth of English soil and climate" (BH,564). If Bleak House, as a story of England's descent into the state of Tom-all-Alone's, has any comic hero, it is he whose typical heroic labours are those of a humanitarian Perseus, whose Andromeda is unfortunate humanity at large--all those "Numbers of the drowning thrown upon a rock" (BH,442) who are found everywhere in scenes of English life. True, Mr. Bucket becomes increasingly prominent at this point and we probably read more about his movements than Woodcourt's, but Bucket's primary role is to expedite the plot towards the end of the novel, otherwise usually an aspect of the hero's functions.

If Woodcourt points the resolution of the social allegory,

Bucket effects that of the melodrama: however traditional the story forms may be, it is integral to the concerns of the novel that the heroes are thoroughly "satiric" in make-up as, in fact, is Tulkinghorn the villain. Of course, English law is the great villain, and if this expresses an allegorical sense of villainy, nonetheless, the human representatives chosen to carry the weight of evil in the novel are inherently of the realistic mode.

In the very act of catalyzing the melodramatic features of the novel's plot, the detective Bucket is also at his most satirical. The Roman on Tulkinghorn's ceiling may have a very allegorical digit, but Bucket has "his fat forefinger" to guide his deliberations on the workings of the universe. The details of his language and activities accurately denote his class: speaking of his knowledge that Lady Dedlock was out walking during the night of the murder, he remarks that he had seen her when going to visit "an aunt of mine that lives at Chelsea--next door but two to the old original Bun House--ninety year old the old lady is, a single woman, and got a little property" (BH, 635)--intimating the minor domestic intrigues of even criminal detectives. It is a description of his breakfast--of tea, eggs, toast, and marmalade--that opens the chapter "Springing a Mine" in which he entraps his murderer and delivers the shock of a lifetime to Sir Leicester; and the descriptive analogy of Bucket is the rather mock-heroic one of a "famous whist-player" who has "the game in his hand, but with a high reputation

involved in his playing his hand out to the last card, in a masterly way" (BH, 636).

Instead of the foreshadowed scene of the great Tulkinghorn confronting Sir Leicester, we have his laboriously orchestrated case fragmented into the irritably-pitched crowings of the old Smallweed, Mrs. Snagsby, and Chadband. The murderer turns out to be a lady's maid and Mr. Bucket's lodger--a circumstance which enables Bucket to make his wife a deputy in the case, with the rousing summons (spoken in their bed, and poor Mrs. Bucket sitting with a sheet stuffed in her mouth, to prevent exclamations of surprise):

Can you do without rest, and keep watch upon her [Hortense], night and day? Can you undertake to say, She shall do nothing without my knowledge, she shall be my prisoner without suspecting it, she shall no more escape from me than from death, and her life shall be my life, and her soul my soul, till I have got her, if she did this murder?' Mrs. Bucket says to me, as well as she could speak, on account of the sheet, 'Bucket, I can!' And she has acted up to it glorious!  
(BH, 650)

And the prisoner is taken off to prison in a cab, with Bucket complacently adjusting her bonnet, as she goes.

Only in Lady Dedlock's response to news of her certain discovery, do we recover the romantic or melodramatic sense of the story, except that it is Mr. Guppy, not Tulkinghorn, who faces her with the fact, just as it has been Bucket rather than Tulkinghorn who has confronted Sir Leicester. It is not the acuteness of Bucket which heightens our sense of her terror--it is, rather, her real foe all along, the fashionable world, the cultivation of the impassive exterior:



Impassive, as behoves its high breeding, the Dedlock town house stares at the other houses in the street of dismal grandeur, and gives no outward sign of anything going wrong within.  
(BH, 667)

Mr. Bucket reads Lady Dedlock's essential innocence and tries to communicate his own essential benevolence through the intuitive logic of emblematically placing Esther at his side during the pursuit. But it is Lady Dedlock's own peers who have never been able to read her face and, in turn, whose exterior appearances have always seemed inimical to her.

In fact, the interest and tragic overtones of Lady Dedlock's story function throughout on the contrast between interior and exterior, past and present. Most of the numerous other characters in the novel exist solely in the present, in their self-dramatization of the moment, the only irony consisting in the moments when hypocrisy is revealed. Chadband is the best instance of this. Such characters are a temporary mannerism to our mind's eye, whereas Lady Dedlock and, to some extent, Esther, are stories, histories, romances: we see the progress of Lady Dedlock's story, rather than her personality. At the same time, Dickens treats the upper classes, not only as a representation of the heroine's inimical Present, but also as the Satirical Present, which spawns the didactic history of Jo: they are a source of narrative tension in both the æsthetic romance and in the allegorized romance, and Dickens ensures that we shun them both emotionally and intellectually.

However, the crisis of Lady Dedlock's discovery is passed over in the increasing momentum of the novel: it is the watch of Sir Leicester and the search by Mr. Bucket which become the felt source of tension. It subsumes Esther's narrative as well, as she joins Bucket. The falling snow and sleet seem to take over the worlds of both narratives: the silence and whiteness outside Sir Leicester's window, muffle the world for him further, and the swollen streams and sludge darken it outside Esther's carriage window. To Sir Leicester's blurred eyes, the atmosphere outside is a "giddy whirl of white flakes and icy blots" (BH, 692), while to Esther the swirl of her water-sodden environment creates an equal fever of confusion and anxiety:

If I ever thought of the time I had been out, it presented itself as an indefinite period of great duration; and I seemed, in a strange way, never to have been free from the anxiety under which I then laboured.  
(BH, 687)

The reader, too, waits, like Sir Leicester and Esther, an indefinite period for the tension to break. It seems as though we must be coursing to the end of the novel, and yet we are forced to watch George and Mrs. Rouncewell pace for hours up and down and around the sickroom and throughout the big house, and Mr. Bucket move up and down from the carriage, in and out of taverns, back and forth along the road between St. Albans and London. It all has the quality of the same long nightmare. It is notable that the worst stylistic didactic excre<sup>c</sup>sences of both narratives are smoothed over by this physical and temporal continuity, just as the

opening mood of the novel is strongly established by the metaphorical elaboration of the fog and mud which are the emotional connotations of Chancery.

In this integration of the two narratives, the diverse characters also come together. Bucket finds Esther's handkerchief and effects her presence at his side; she is taken to meet the Snagsbys and Guster; Jenny, the mother of the dead child whom Esther covered with that handkerchief, becomes confused in Esther's mind with her own mother; and Allan Woodcourt somehow emerges from the night shadows, to take his place at Esther's side during her ordeal. Nor can the reader himself recall by what chain of association Woodcourt knows Mr. Bucket: if they met at George's through Jo, or how Esther knows George who, meanwhile through Mrs. Bagnet's agency, has been reunited with his mother--it is an endless swirl for the reader, too, even as everything focuses on this last journey.

Eventually the two narratives separate out again, and in the aftermath of Esther's recovery of her dead mother, she is encircled by the familiar personages of her own narrative. Jarndyce and Jarndyce is brought to a tidy end but the satire based on it continues: Chancery is locked into its infernal practices, and it is up to the individual characters to find personal redemption. Thus Sir Leicester is both invalided and redeemed by his grief at Lady Dedlock's death; he continues to mourn his wife and read himself into a stupored state with the absurdities of "Buffy and Boodle."

Nevertheless, if the novel was placed on the satirical

note by the beginning of the omniscient narrative, it is ended and taken out of this by Esther's narrative, in particular, by the action of Allan Woodcourt. Just as he helped Jo, so he is a bedside mentor for Richard's translation into a higher world and a life lived apart from the Chancery Daimon and nightmare. Richard asks of him: "And you, being a good man, can pass it as such, and forgive and pity the dreamer, and be lenient and encouraging when he wakes?" and Woodcourt replies "Indeed I can. What am I but another dreamer, Rick?" (BH, 763). He makes Esther "the doctor's wife," the mistress of Bleak House, and is the "mirror" in which she sees her old self, with her looks restored in his gaze.

And it is the doctor and the doctor's wife, the practical Christians who bring good into the world of Bleak House, through their private and sincere charity. If there is any overall allegory, this is it: justice is restored, not by a reformed Chancery, but by conscientious and compassionate individuals. The novel's story moves from satirical stasis into the narrative processes of romance and comedy: didacticism is banished, the fog and mud of the nightmare recede and yield to consolatory dreams.

CHAPTER VI  
NARRATIVE REASONING: LITTLE DORRIT

The complementary narratives by which the "story" of Bleak House is conveyed show how two contrasting rhetorics can work in conjunction, but largely without mutual reference, to produce a novel and the idea which we denote by that name. That Dickens produced the two narratives from an original idea which he thought of as "Bleak House" cannot be demonstrated --although this is recognizably a long way from Pickwick Papers, where Dickens seemed almost involuntarily to write himself from a drivel of words used in their "Pickwickian sense" into a narrative stamped with his own literary form and beliefs.

The appropriate choice of rhetoric and narrative voice was important for Dickens. Despite the affirmation of his powerful early originality, Dickens had continued after Pickwick, as we have seen, to seek alternative strategies for periodical writing. In the ongoing effort to reach his public, the establishment of the Cheap Edition and of Household Words were among his more successful achievements. Essentially the new prefaces and the weekly articles expressed the same values as his fiction but were far



less strenuous to write. The assumption of another format and voice seems to have entailed a different kind of intellectual effort, demanding less continuity and foresight. As well, the restricted space of the weekly numbers of the fiction in Household Words called for the orchestration of fewer effects and incidents.

In a letter concerning the beginning of Little Dorrit --which Forster uses to suggest the increasing difficulty Dickens had with "invention" but which may simply show, too, the type of thinking which his novels always demanded from him--Dickens worried that "by making the fellow-travellers at once known to each other," as the opening of the story stands, he had missed an "effect":

It struck me that it would be a new thing to show people coming together, in a chance way, as fellow-travellers, and being in the same place, ignorant of one another, the waiting for that connection a part of the interest. (Forster, Bk. 8, Chp. 1, pp. 623-24)

This indicates more than keeping an eye on the plot; it also evokes a basic sense of how narrative operates, and how it generates its own interest. Further examples of this will be treated at length in the next chapter, but this one shows how the story-teller involves the reader by playing on his expectations. The writer evokes the random disconnectedness of our social encounters in life, while knowing that in fictional experience, we commonly expect formulaic introductions--that is, the recital of the characters' stories up to that point, which will thereby rationalize the opening chosen. For the reader, simply

by the fact of taking up a book, is ready to indulge in the exercise of fantasy, and looks for certainty and coherence. By withholding these things, the story-teller seems to side with the irrationality of life, and draws his reader in with the promise of an explanation--the explanation which is the story itself.

The appetite for explanation as a form of reassurance is obviously a common one among men, in life as well as books: narrative can both stimulate and satisfy it, on a variety of levels and scales. For the novel-writer, the manipulation of its possibilities requires a great deal of control, whereas the writing of journalism may be easier because it often arrives at its purpose merely in the first activity of chafing the appetite.

The emergence of Little Dorrit in the spring of 1855 gave Dickens an opportunity in which he could, and did, make use of both journalistic and fictional periodical formats, often at the same time, to discuss feelings and ideas aroused by contemporary affairs. Generally, these discussions meant only the summoning up of his formidable verbal muscularity behind a certain position, but we may wish to see whether in any of this writing, particularly the fiction, Dickens can be discerned in the process of actually thinking about his ideas through the process of narrative.

Did the telling of a story carry its own "logic" for him, which might have shaped his apprehension of the problems being examined? The comparison of Little Dorrit with related articles suggests perhaps that fictional rhetoric

seeks to persuade differently from the rhetoric of ephemeral commentary, and that narrative has its own characteristic syllogisms, which lead to answers different from the collective deductions of occasional satire.

In August 1854, approximately a month after completing Hard Times, Dickens wrote to Forster,

I have got an idea for occasional papers in Household Words called the Member for Nowhere. They will contain an account of his views, votes, and speeches; and I think of starting with his speeches on the Sunday question.  
(Forster, Bk.11, Chp. 3, p. 826)

Although Dickens seems never to have published any articles under this heading, and subsequently wrote Forster, "I give it up reluctantly, and with it my hope to have made every man in England feel something of the contempt for the House of Commons that I have" (Forster, Bk.11, Chp.3, p.826), the years 1854-57, when he produced Hard Times and Little Dorrit, saw the appearance of at least fifteen articles by Dickens on political and administrative topics.

There was, of course, much happening in the political life of England over these years to provoke writers, whether of journalism or fiction, to critical comment. In 1853, the Coalition government formed by Aberdeen near the end of 1852 had come to appear impressive as it brought to law the Succession Duty spreading taxation more equally among the classes, the Corn Law finally achieving free trade, and the India Bill which threw the civil service appointments in India open to free competition. But by March 1854 the peace

of the past thirty-eight years had turned into war, and faith in a strong government had dwindled into doubt about a weak one, as hesitating statesmen vacillated between intermittent demonstrations of military strength and uncertain diplomatic efforts to maintain peace. Public opinion which previously had been smug about peace and stability under Aberdeen's coalition government, now cried out for definitive action against the longstanding ambitions of Russia in Asia.

The Crimean War, in its first days had generated wide public enthusiasm, and then startled horror at War Office incompetency and the British humiliation. The general expectations which preceded the country's official entry into hostilities with Russia are analysed by Olive Anderson in A Liberal State at War. Mrs. Anderson notes that:

In particular those who were most conscious of the pace of change in Britain since 1815 and of her dissimilarity from the great powers, when they speculated at length upon British fitness for a major war gave quite as much attention to political and economic conditions and to the moral state of her people, as to the state of her armed forces. Here were the first early perceptions that the organization of a modern nation for war is not basically a military matter.<sup>1</sup>

In this sense a picture of the nation in 1854 would have been highly compatible with a novelist's traditional preoccupation with the moral life. Both the distinctive institutions of British life and the moral constitutions of its various leaders were to be put on trial in a

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<sup>1</sup>Olive Anderson, A Liberal State at War (London: Macmillan, 1967) pp. 6-7.

decisive and fundamental manner. On 23 January 1855 John Arthur Roebuck, the Sheffield Member for Parliament, moved that the House of Commons set up a Select Committee to inquire into the condition of the Army and the sources of its mismanagement at Sebastopol. This motion was accepted and the committee conducted open sessions of inquiry from February until 18 June, when its report was presented.

Meanwhile, there was a protracted crisis of leadership during February 1855 when, after the defeat of Lord Aberdeen's coalition government, both Derby and Russell were unsuccessful in forming a ministry and only Palmerston finally managed to draw a government together. Furthermore, both the long pending questions of Administrative Reform and Sunday trading once again came to controversial prominence in these times. All of these issues caught Dickens's interest at various periods.

In the Household Words issue for 17 December 1853, an article (by Bayle St. John and W.H. Wills), noting that there had lately been news reports of a Russian frigate near Varna and the British consul leaving Varna, undertook to provide a short history and geography of this hitherto obscure site. Similarly, "A Border of the Black Sea" (21 January 1854) gave further details about Bulgaria at a time when its ports and cities were being watched by a British squadron. The same attention was directed towards: "Bucharest" (1 October 1853), "Turks in Bulgaria" (12 November 1853), "The Horse Guards Rampant" (31 December 1853), "The Roving Englishman at Constantinople" (21 October 1853), and



"Moldo-Wallachia" (24 September 1853). These and other articles after the actual onset of the war indicate the concern of Household Words to inform its readers usefully about the war and its ramifications. Dickens himself was responsible for a number of these (mostly the ones after the war had actually begun), and his contributions were often the leading articles of their issues.

Judging by the choice of controversial topics which he selected to write about personally rather than simply supervise, Dickens seems to have been more interested in administrative reform than in the war, except perhaps as the events of the latter demonstrated the need for reform. In a letter of 3 January 1855 to W.F. de Cerjat, he wrote:

absorption of the English mind in the war is, to me, a melancholy thing. Every other subject of popular solicitude and sympathy goes down before it. I fear I clearly see that for years to come domestic reforms are shaken to the root; every miserable red-tapist flourishes war over the head of every protester against his humbug; and everything connected with it is pushed to such an unreasonable extent, that, however kind and necessary it may be in itself, it becomes ridiculous.  
(NL, II, 615)

In fact, Olive Anderson cites evidence to suggest that Lord John Russell's Parliamentary Reform Bill was defeated by war-time considerations and private parliamentary lobbies equally,<sup>2</sup> that the recent session of January-August 1854 passed the second highest volume of legislation in the decade of the 1850s,<sup>3</sup> and that in the development of general attitudes,

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<sup>2</sup>Anderson, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup>Anderson, p. 171.

two years of war may have worked more to liberalize English religious and class attitudes than the twenty years of discussion since the first Reform Bill. Although Dickens himself may not have perceived this directly, his own novel Little Dorrit can be seen as one of the artifacts of this liberalization.

One feature of this process was the change registered generally in public characterizations of class differences:

If the Crimean War was ushered in by much admiration of knightly self-sacrifice and heroism, and frequently expressed hopes of salvation from sordid Mammon-worship, before it was half-way through it had effected a total reversal of the qualities held up for admiration, and of the class stereotypes with which they were associated. The aristocracy no longer appeared as born war-leaders free from base middle-class materialism, but as out-of-date privileged bunglers who should make way for the efficient, self-reliant men of the age....The poetry of hunting and shooting, of county society, and the London season, had since the days of George IV a rival in the poetry of business....In the crisis of the Crimean War, the great middle-class public identified military and political ability with commercial experience with an arrogance and confidence which could hardly have been more complete. Nothing could give stronger proof of the spell cast by the poetry of business in the fifties than the assumption which permeated the Administrative Reform movement that even in the midst of war--indeed especially in the midst of war--the techniques of government should be but the techniques of commerce writ large.<sup>4</sup>

After his early experience as a Parliamentary reporter in the eighteen-thirties, it is clear that Dickens had little confidence in the aristocracy as governors, even before his participation in the Administrative Reform movement; and the tale of Arthur Clennam and Daniel Doyce versus the Barnacles and the Stiltstalkings is partly a fable

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<sup>4</sup>Anderson, p. 109; p. 108.

for the winter of 1854-55 when a general re-writing of class mythologies took place as outlined above. Just as Hard Times reflected the sources of antagonism between the working classes and their middle-class employers, so Little Dorrit reflects the alliance in the eighteen-fifties, of these two classes against the non-commercial aristocracy.

Still, in Little Dorrit this is shown with a difference. Men of business such as either Meagles or Merdle are shown also as hangers-on the fringes of the aristocracy. It is Doyce the inventor, and Clennam the quiet man of integrity, who are endorsed by Dickens. As usual, he is neither immune to the tendencies of his times, nor so naïve that he torpidly drifts with them, and his fiction is a more precise expression of this than polemic.

The smaller satiric "fables" which Dickens published during this period demonstrate some of the range of his interest in topics of administrative reform. In the autumn of 1854, while in Boulogne he had composed "It is Not Generally Known" to head the first September issue of Household Words, and "Legal and Equitable Jokes" to head another issue a few weeks later. "It is Not Generally Known" was based on an idea of Dickens to "note in the Debates every night all through the Session, every personal attack and personal discussion between Hon. Mems." (NL,II,577-78; 7 August 1854); and similarly, "Legal and Equitable Jokes" was based on some evidence which Wills forwarded to Dickens "in reference to the county courts" (NL,II,582; 23 August 1854).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>This was, in fact, the evidence of Graham Willinore,

In the Parliamentary satire, Dickens depicts members of "a certain large Club which assembles at Westminster" variously debating as "the right hand" and "the left hand," "Mr. Pot" and "Mr. Kettle," "A," "B," and "C," etc.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the satire of the courts mimics the speech patterns of their members in order to draw attention to their moral and social insensitivity--the "jokes" of the barrister who narrates being a facetious euphemism for the injustices or inequalities which he has no inclination to abolish.

Thus, over the months preceding the start of Dickens's work on Little Dorrit, he produced a number of articles which, by their satirical manner, pressed the cause of administrative reform. And, even during the writing of the novel, he continued to work in other, more publicly visible ways. We know from letters to Miss Coutts (1 May 1855; NL,II,659) and Wilkie Collins (11 May 1855; NL,II,660-61), in which he speaks of his restlessness at the effort of beginning the first pages of his new book, that the novel was begun during May 1855. On 2 June, Dickens wrote to Austen Henry Layard that, because of prior engagements, he was unable

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in the Appendix to the First Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of the County Courts; see A. Lohrli, A Weekly Journal 1850-1860, Household Words (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 129.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Dickens, "It is Not Generally Known," Household Words 10 (2 September 1854): 49-52.

to attend the next meeting of the Administrative Reform Association which the latter had initiated as an extra-Parliamentary means of exciting public opinion over the issue; but Dickens assured Layard of his interest, saying,

I am constantly putting the subject in as sharp lights as I can kindle, in Household Words--have a little paper for next week's, at this moment in press (called Cheap Patriotism) quite apropos to Thursday.  
(NL,II,667)

It would appear that in the same few weeks during which Dickens began Little Dorrit, he was also preparing this leading article for Household Words.

It is, of course, true, as John Butt shows from his study of the Little Dorrit manuscript in Dickens at Work, that Dickens did not compose the chapter "Containing the Whole Science of Government," which was part of the third number, until September 1855. On 4 October 1855, he wrote to W.C. Macready,

what with flunkyism, toadyism, letting the most contemptible lords come in for all manner of places, reading The Court Circular for the New Testament I do reluctantly believe that the English people are habitually consenting parties to the miserable imbecility into which we have fallen, and never will help themselves out of it.  
...In No. 3 of my new book I have been blowing off a little of indignant steam which would otherwise blow me up.  
(NL,II,694-95)

Even though the satiric intent would not have been obvious to readers of the first two numbers, the working title, Nobody's Fault, which is strongly suggestive of a politico-satiric purpose derived from the political and military events of the previous winter, seems to have been co-existent with the earliest notes, and the wrapper



illustration consisted partly of a political cartoon showing Britannia led to her destruction by aristocratic boobies and political toadies.

This title is said by Forster to have taken "its origin from the notion he [Dickens] had of a leading man for a story who should bring about all the mischief in it, lay it all on Providence, and say at every fresh calamity, 'Well, it's a mercy, however, nobody was to blame you know!'" (Forster, Bk. 8, Chp. 1, p. 623). With reference to this notion, it is useful to note that there is a piece of political allegory entitled "Fast and Loose" written by Dickens for the 24 March 1855 issue of Household Words, at a time when the Roebuck Committee reports had been attracting public attention for the previous month or so. Its opening scene puts forward the argument--a favourite one at this period--that no commercial shareholding body would have indefinitely tolerated the management of their company by a board of directors who had wreaked as much havoc with the company's productivity as the peers of the current government had with the country. Dickens concludes this miniature drama with the rhetorical question:

and if by such means those incapable Directors destroyed thousands of lives, wasted millions of money, and hopelessly bewildered and conglomerated themselves and everybody else; what would the shareholding body say, if those brazen-faced Directors called them together in the midst of the wreck and ruin they had made, and with an audacious piety addressed them thus: "Lo, ye miserable sinners, the hand of Providence is heavy on you! Attire yourselves in sackcloth, throw ashes on your heads, fast, and hear us

condescend to make discourses on the wrong you have done!"<sup>7</sup>

This point is similarly reinforced with a fable of bankers who, having debilitated the entire mercantile system, "cry out, 'Providence has brought you all to the Gazette. Listen, wicked ones, and we will give you an improving lecture on' the death of the old Lady in Threadneedle Street.'"<sup>8</sup>

The most sustained invective is derived from the fable of "a very fine gentleman" on horseback who, travelling with a simple man inferior in education and privileges to himself, contrives to render the latter "rebuked, crippled, handcuffed, starved, with his brother burnt to death in a locked-up house, and the key of the house going round the world."<sup>9</sup> The damning feature of the dainty gentleman's portrayal consists, finally, of his use of the formula "Providence" to rationalize the misfortunes which he has inflicted on the other man, and as in the preceding parables, his arbitrary insistence on fasting as the necessary appeasement of this capricious and inhumane force. The repeated allusions to fasting would have recalled to the reader of 1855 the national days of fasting and humiliation called by the government on 28 March and 26 April. The facetiousness of the pointed denial that

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<sup>7</sup>Charles Dickens, "Fast and Loose," Household Words 11 (24 March 1855): 169.

<sup>8</sup>Dickens, "Fast and Loose": 169.

<sup>9</sup>Dickens, "Fast and Loose": 170.

these tales "can have no application--how were that possible!--to the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-five"<sup>10</sup> of course emphasizes the relevance of these incidents to the contemporary political scene.

Thus, in some sense, the mysterious "leading man" of John Forster's description, laying all his culpability on "Providence"--for which John Butt was unable to find a satisfactory character counterpart in Little Dorrit as we have it now--may take its inspiration from the national phenomenon of bureaucratic irresponsibility which emerged during the Crimean Inquiry, and therefore, in turn, may find its most natural correspondence in the many-headed personality of the Circumlocution Office, which is certainly a more obvious agent of mischief than any of the individual characters.

Nonetheless, the immoral expedient of invoking Providence as the guilty agent seems substantially different from the notion of "Nobody" being at fault. "Providence" is not, for Dickens, as it might be for twentieth-century writers, a denotation of Void. The ordinary man of "Fast and Loose" can ultimately confound those who would restrict his freedom with the formula "Providence," because "his thought, red-eyed and angry though he was, escapes from them up to the true Providence far away" and he "humbled and quieted his mind before Heaven."<sup>11</sup> This passage implies

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<sup>10</sup>Dickens, "Fast and Loose": 170.

<sup>11</sup>Dickens, "Fast and Loose": 170.

the identification of a "true Providence" with the Christian God who beneficently orders the progress of the world, and also, by contrast, the immoral wilfulness of those petty individuals who cite its name for their own self-interested purposes.

In the public media of the time there were a number of idiomatic expressions evoking the sense of helplessness felt by the British people at the inability of the Crimean Inquiry to discover a calculating villain at the source of all the disarray and dishonour. The printed parliamentary record of the "Army before Sebastopol" inquiry shows a fondness for answers which specify precise areas of accountability, and indeed, its summary organized its findings under distinct headings "in order fairly to apportion the responsibility."<sup>12</sup> "Whom Shall We Hang?" a pamphlet circulating in the autumn of 1854, and "Who's to Blame?" an article by Cardinal Newman in the Catholic Standard, typify the obsession of the time with a frustrated moral indignation.

The testimonies of Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan (Assistant Secretary of the Treasury 1840-December 1854), the Duke of Newcastle (Minister for War from the beginning of the War till the end of Aberdeen's government), and Lord Aberdeen, before the Sebastopol Committee, were extensively covered and commented on by The Times during April and May. Regarding this very tendency in Trevelyan's testimony

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<sup>12</sup>"Army before Sebastopol," Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees 1854-55, Volume IX, Part 3, pp. 22-23.

to lead his questioners a merry chase for a culprit,

The Times remarked, in an editorial for 19 April 1855:

it has occurred to most people as rather strange that MR. FILDER should be the object of so much censure; that so much should depend on one man, and that man not a soldier; that our triumph or our failure in the greatest deed of arms ever attempted in the world should rest with a humble civilian, a clerk 64 years old, sitting on his stool at his desk for twenty-four hours together, and just toddling off now and then to a comfortable meal. Grant that MR. FILDER did his work ever so will, grant him to be worse than anybody has yet ventured to insinuate, and we have only to say that it does seem to us a very unaccountable thing that the balance of Europe and Asia, the continuance of the Turks on this side the Bosphorus, the dominion of the Euxine, the final supremacy of the Mediterranean, the free navigation of the Danube, the independence of Germany, the warlike reputation of England, the glory of France, the reign of NAPOLEON III, the interests of humanity, the issue of the great battle of Armageddon, as DR. CUMMING assures us, the latter days of Palestine, the sovereignty of India, and the destiny of the world, should all depend on MR. FILDER, on his temper and his digestion; on his stock of foolscap and quill pens or whatever else may be supposed to affect the excitable nerves or the precarious appetite of a respectable elderly clerk.

(p. 8)

Among other such editorials, it is interesting to note, about the phrase "Nobody's Fault," that in The Illustrated London News of 7 April 1855, under the heading of "The Crimean Committee," a report reads:

No culprit has yet been got at so as to fix him clearly with the responsibility for any failure. ...So all the confusion and blunders, ending in inflicting very avoidable suffering at a (now) unavoidable cost, have arisen from an invisible influence, mysterious and impersonal--"a bodiless creation," blighting everywhere, but nowhere to be grasped....Where so much evil is so abstract, and nobody's fault, it would be almost gratifying to discover something "concrete" enough to come within the pains and penalties of a statute.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>The Illustrated London News 26 (7 April 1855): 322.



One notes that, unlike the practice with other satirical phrases in the article, no inverted commas mark off the words "nobody's fault." Of course, there is no evidence to indicate whether or not Dickens may have seen, or had his attention drawn to, this report; we know that he did have English papers sent to him at Boulogne where he was at this time. He certainly received The Times, and there is a letter written 29 September 1854 from Boulogne to W.H. Wills, in which he mentions having seen the Examiner and The Illustrated London News (NL,II,592). And when attempting to assist Austen Henry Layard in the latter's agitation for administrative reform, Dickens advised Layard in a letter of 3 April 1855 (NL,II,648) that he had arranged through newspaper friends for favourable news coverage of the cause in The Weekly Chronicle and The Illustrated London News. Beyond this, there can be little fruitful speculation about the actual source of inspiration--if any--for this title. It is enough to note that Dickens enthusiastically chose it, out of many possible formulations of the same general sentiment, under which to organize his thoughts for his forthcoming book.

Dickens's most extended play with the notion of "Nobody" as the national euphemism for culpability consists of an article entitled "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody" which he wrote for the 30 August 1856 issue of Household Words. Here, we get some idea of how Dickens thought of developing this conceit of "nobody's fault." Instead of constructing a tale wherein individuals wrongly invoke the verbal formula

of a "Providence" or remote system, the article paradoxically endows a formula denoting negation with a freakish power, rather like that of The Times' "Mr. Filder":

THE power of Nobody is becoming so enormous in England, and he alone is responsible for so many proceedings, both in the way of commission and omissions; he has so much to answer for, and is so constantly called to account; that a few remarks upon him may not be ill-timed.

The hand which this surprising person had in the late war is amazing to consider. It was he who left the tents behind, who left the baggage behind, who chose the worst possible ground for encampments, who provided no means of transport, who killed the horses, who paralysed the commissariat, who knew nothing of the business he professed to know and monopolised, who decimated the English army.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the passage most particularly relevant to Little Dorrit is the paragraph:

In civil matters we have Nobody equally active. When a civil office breaks down, the break-down is sure to be in Nobody's department....A dispatch of the greatest moment is sent to a minister abroad, at a most important crisis; Nobody reads it. British subjects are affronted in a foreign territory; Nobody interferes....The government, with all its mighty means and appliances, is invariably beaten and outstripped by private enterprise; which we all know to be Nobody's fault.<sup>15</sup>

The article, as John Butt reminds us, was composed when Dickens was about halfway through the writing of Little Dorrit, a few weeks after completing "A Shoal of Barnacles," the twenty-fourth chapter.

The article not only points out the history of

<sup>14</sup>Charles Dickens, "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody," Household Words 14 (30 August 1856): 145.

<sup>15</sup>Dickens, "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody": 146.

Nobody in the Crimean War and the Civil Service, but its ultimately corrupting influence on the moral consciousness of the country as a whole, "the great irresponsible, guilty, wicked, blind giant of this time."<sup>16</sup> Which leads Dickens to admonish:

O friends, countrymen, and lovers, look at that carcase smelling strong of prussic acid, (drunk out of a silver milkpot, which was a part of the plunder, or as the less pernicious thieves call it, the swag), cumbering Hampstead Heath by London town! Think of the history of which that abomination is at once the beginning and the end; of the dark social scenes daguerreotyped in it; and of the Lordship of your Treasury to which Nobody driving a shameful bargain, raised this creature when he was alive. Follow the whole story, and finish by listening to the parliamentary lawyers as they tell you that Nobody knows anything about it; that Nobody is entitled (from the attorney point of view) to believe that there ever was such a business at all; that Nobody can be allowed to demand for decency's sake, the swift expulsion from the lawmaking body of the surviving instrument in the heap of crime; that such expulsion is, in a word, just Nobody's business, and must at present be constitutionally left to Nobody to do.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, a number of months before the chapter in which Merdle and the Barnacles confer, Dickens brings together the activities of commercial rapacity and governmental toadying, in his invocation of John Sadleir's history as a financial and railroad speculator, a criminal swindler, and concurrently as an M.P., later junior Lord of the Treasury under Lord Aberdeen. When Sadleir was found dead, on Hampstead Heath after swallowing poison out of a silver cream jug on 17 February 1856, The Times obituary respectfully described

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<sup>16</sup>Dickens, "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody": 146.

<sup>17</sup>Dickens, "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody": 146.

his career as a successful businessman; but a month later, on 10 March 1856, the paper carried a leading article indignantly branding him as a "national calamity" (p.8). Dickens apparently agreed: not only in the sense that thousands of small investors in Sadleir's banks and railroads had been ruined for life, but also insofar as he had been accepted and even exalted by men whose judgement was responsible for the moral and political health of the country. In "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody" the paragraph denouncing Sadleir and those who sponsored him is succinct enough, but it does exhort the reader to expand on the hints dropped and to "think of the dark social scenes daguerreotyped" in the history of the man's insinuation into English society --thus, the moral denunciation spills over into an imaginative portrait.

In a letter dated April 1856, Dickens told Forster:

I had the general idea of the Society business before the Sadleir affair, but I shaped Mr. Merdle out of that precious rascality. Society, the Circumlocution Office, and Mr. Gowan, are of course three parts of one idea and design. Mr. Merdle's complaint which you will find in the end to be fraud and forgery, came into my mind as the last drop in the silver cream-jug on Hampstead Heath. (Forster, Bk.8, Chp.1, p. 623)

Just as in the article, the prominence achieved by a man such as Sadleir was, in Dickens's opinion, but one manifestation of governmental degeneracy, so too in the novel, the fame commanded by Merdle is a reflection upon the moral barrenness of "Society." As Sylvia Bank Manning has pointed out,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Sylvia Bank Manning, Dickens as Satirist (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), Chp. 2.

by this time, Dickens's indignation and satire are no longer directed against criminal individuals, such as Pecksniff in Martin Chuzzlewit or the similarly suicidal usurer Ralph Nickleby in Nicholas Nickleby, the removal of whom restores the comic progress of the story: the "Society" of Little Dorrit will continue after the extinction of Merdle, with its vices and incapacibilities intact, for its moral corruption will outlive the isolated instance of criminal corruption. Although Clennam's and Doyce's problems may be resolved happily by the end of Little Dorrit and even Merdle vanquished by death, nothing in their fates implies the extinction of the Barnacles. In this sense the satire of the later novels begins to approach the level of political pessimism found in the journalism and in Dickens's feelings about English society at this time.

Of course, the earlier novels evoke a different kind of political consciousness: when Dickens was able to banish selfishness and hypocrisy from the lives of Martin Chuzzlewit and his friends simply by banishing Pecksniff, it appears that he thought reform in society worked with a finality and definitiveness similar to the end of fairy tales. Even up to 1847, only seven years before Little Dorrit, he was capable of writing in the preface to the Cheap Edition of Pickwick:

I shall cherish the hope that every volume of this Edition will afford me an opportunity of recording the extermination of some wrong or abuse set forth in it.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Dickens, "Preface," Pickwick Papers (1847), p. xi.



Subsequently, however, Dickens seems to have progressed from this view of life--wherein villains and crimes are reduced to individual blemishes on a still sound and integral social fabric--to the incorporation in his fiction of elements which resist fairy-tale resolutions. Thus the material about Clennam's encounter with the Circumlocution Office remains essentially separate from the same character's involvement with the life of the Marshalsea. True, the Circumlocution Office is finally removed as a hindrance and threat to his plans, but at the end of the book, while the involved reader need no longer be concerned about Clennam's wooing of Amy Dorrit, it is perhaps not as certain that the vagaries of government bureaucracy will never again trouble his mind.

This satirical examination of bureaucracy is not as specifically detailed in the novel as it is in the articles such as "Cheap Patriotism" or "The Home Office," and the latter, in turn, are even less so than the articles which pick out for comment individually notorious Parliamentary personalities, such as "Mr. Bull's Somnambulist" or "The Thousand and One Humbugs." Paradoxically the latter are almost always recognizable by a blueprint use of fairy-tale characterization and plots, while the novels achieve their effect with a greater degree of "realistic"--as opposed to authentic--detail. Comparison of these satirical manners may elucidate the peculiar characteristics of the topical satire in Little Dorrit.

The opening words of both the chapter "Containing the Whole Science of Government" and "The Thousand and One Humbugs"

ostensibly cast their stories into earlier historical periods. We know from the first descriptions of Marseilles, and of William Dorrit beginning his life in the Marshalsea, that the events of Little Dorrit take place in the mid-eighteen-twenties. However in "Containing the Whole Science of Government" no details of the history of the British political scene in the eighteen-twenties are offered, and only a general blanket sort of past tense is invoked. The inference of the first sentence and its interjection--"The Circumlocution Office was (as everybody knows without being told) the most important Department under government"<sup>20</sup>--is as clear as Dickens's statement in "The Thousand and One Humbugs" about the Arabian manuscripts found, that "it would often seem--were it not for the manifest impossibility of such prophetic knowledge in any mere man or men--that they were written expressly with an eye to events of the current age."<sup>21</sup> One also recalls the first chapter entitled "The Period" in A Tale of Two Cities, where the attempt to define the peculiar quality of the French Revolution era--"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."--culminates in the statement that "in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being

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<sup>20</sup>Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1857), Bk. 1, Chp. 10, p. 75. All future page references to this work will be incorporated in my text, preceded by "LD" and the appropriate book and chapter numbers, and enclosed in parentheses.

<sup>21</sup>Charles Dickens, "The Thousand and One Humbugs," Household Words 11 (21 April 1855): 265.

received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only"--a direction by the author as to how he would have us apply our reading of the novel.

In Little Dorrit the confounding of past and present historical periods is easily effected within the customary past tense of story-telling: thus, "Thirty years ago, Marseilles lay burning in the sun, one day" effectively translates as a "Once upon a time" formula for modern times. One thinks of the subtitle for Hard Times: "For These Times." Or the opening to Our Mutual Friend: "In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise." Dickens never defines "these times" explicitly, though the novels themselves in which this expression is used, amply indicate the dissatisfaction with modern life. The remarkable thing is that he discovered a formula which is uniquely precise and generalizing at the same time: the Victorian and twentieth-century readers may recognize the specific incidents and personages obliquely implied and yet the actual phrase "these times of ours" is as vague, and quite as meaningful, as "Once upon a time."

When the original background to Dorrit's imprisonment is queried, Ferdinand Barnacle tells how it was that "ages before the fairy came out of the Bank and gave him his fortune, under a bond he [Dorrit] had signed for the performance of a contract which was not at all performed. He was a partner in a house in some large way--spirits, or buttons, or wine, or blacking, or oatmeal, or woollen, or pork, or hooks and eyes, or iron, or treacle, or shoes, or something or other

that was wanted for troops, or seamen, or somebody--and the house burst, and we being among the creditors, detainers were lodged on the part of the Crown in a scientific manner, and all the rest of it" (ID, Bk. 2, Chp. 12, p. 424). This account suggests that the story of the Dorrits had connections in Dickens's mind with the specific evils of the Crimean War as well as with the more general bureaucratic malaise. By the time Dickens wrote this passage, however, the country was less eager to recall the episode of the war in its history, and would perhaps only want to have it invoked in the vague way of a Ferdinand Barnacle. In fact, it is perhaps due to this very airiness of manner by which we hear of this reason for Dorrit's bankruptcy, that few modern readers can readily remember this otherwise very historically precise explanation, another example of Dickens's combination of specificity and generalization. It seems that, as with the catchphrase "these times of ours," the actual content of the history referred to--whether it be the Victorian or our own present--is of less importance to the satire found in Little Dorrit's "Society" or Circumlocution Office than the common feeling that the present is, like the past, a definably historical period. This insight is ideally realized in the generalizing past tense of story-telling when used, as by Dickens in Little Dorrit, to articulate his dissatisfactions with English life in the eighteen-fifties.

Unlike the closing sentence of the article "Fast and Loose," which trenchantly draws attention to its connections with the events of the year 1855, and thereby secures its effect

in that way, the generalization of time in these passages indicates the contrary tendency of the novel to create a complete, self-contained world operating by its own inner logic. Theories of the novel generally agree that it is the literary form with the greatest inherent allusiveness to the real world, and yet here we see how unlike the specific allusiveness of journalism that is: it seems that as a novel imitates the real world by its comprehensiveness of psychological and social patterning, paradoxically it begins to exclude, or refine itself of the material details of the world whose structures it simulates. Dickens chose to put thirty years between the Circumlocution Office experience depicted in Little Dorrit and "the common experience of an Englishman...in the days of a Russian war, and of a Court of Inquiry at Chelsea"(v) which it ostensibly simulates.

By contrast, the more superficially fantastic "Thousand and One Humbugs" article is very much a product of the spring of 1855.<sup>22</sup> particularly as the names of the characters, even more than the story recounted, reproduce the figures of that period--indeed, the verbal mimicry of the names stimulating a large part of our interest. The recognizability of names such as "Howsa Kummauns," "Parmarston," and "Abaddeen" (or in "Mr. Bull's Somnambulist," "Abby Dean"), "Layardeen,"

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<sup>22</sup>I describe it as such even while noting Una Pope-Hennessy's undocumented, but intriguing, statement that "The Thousand and One Humbugs" had been "written in early life and tinkered at, brought up to date and published when Palmerston became Prime Minister." Una Pope-Hennessy, Charles Dickens (1945; London: The Reprint Society, 1947), p. 46.



and "Penshunlist" or "Dublincumtax," and the political-cartoon-like qualities of the imaginary "smoking dish of Refawm" with its "Educational Kabobs," "pillar of Church-endowments-and-duties," and "ragout called Law-of-Partnership," render the satirical aspiration and target completely unambiguously. With articles such as "The Thousand and One Humbugs" and "Mr. Bull's Somnambulist," Fitzjames Stephen could never have complained, as he did in the Saturday Review, of the relationship between facts and the resulting satire in Little Dorrit that:

Mr. Dickens's facts are entirely imaginary. The evidence on which his conclusion was really based, consisting as it did, of ignorant popular rumours and vague newspaper statements, was so worthless as to be absolutely dull....Nobody can trace the mental operation by which the Barnacles and the other Circumlocutionists were conceived. It is Mr. Dickens's secret exclusively.<sup>23</sup>

In political cartoons--whether pictorial or verbal--the figures represented are necessarily cognizable in order to achieve their humorous and vituperative effects. But in "Containing the Whole Science of Government," although there are no obvious parodies of well-known names, the familiar structures of English government are present: elections, the Speech from the Throne, memoranda, and minutes. Parliamentary speech patterns are also suggested in the account of how the Circumlocution Office might be defended by a member of the government:

Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that it would have been more to his

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23 James Fitzjames Stephen, "The Edinburgh Review and Modern Novelists," Saturday Review 4 (18 July 1857): 57.

honor, more to his credit, more to his good taste, more to his good sense, more to half the dictionary of commonplaces, if he had left the Circumlocution Office alone, and never approached this matter.  
(LD, Bk. 1, Chp. 10, pp. 76-77)

Nonetheless, the account of the Barnacle family which follows, can only be taken as an elaborate spiral of fancy. When we read the formally, even pseudo-scientifically, phrased description of the Barnacles' intermarriage with the Stiltstalkings, the conceit of documenting the spread of Barnacles and other families who have become adapted in the development of the species to a ruling function, it seems reminiscent of the "Thousand and One Humbugs" marriage of Scarli Tapa's son to Jobbiana:

They had a large family and a powerful number of relations, who all inherited by right of relationship, the power of opening Sesame and shutting it tight. The Yawyawahs became a very numerous tribe also, and exercised the same privilege. This...is the reason why, in that distant part of the dominions of the Sultan of the Indies, all true believers kiss the ground seven hundred and seventy-seven times on hearing the magic words, Debrett's Peerage--why the talisman of Office is always possessed in common by the three great races of the Scarli Tapas, the Yawyawahs, and the Jobbianas.<sup>24</sup>

Where "Thousand and One Humbugs" parodies fairy-story jargon, the description of the Barnacles' inheritance is a pastiche of the legal and business vocabulary that prevails in a modern capitalist society. The comparison of this vocabulary with fairy-tale patterns of speech perhaps suggests how ritualistic this modern language is. In the context of

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<sup>24</sup>Dickens, "The Thousand and One Humbugs," Household Words 11 (28 April 1855): 291-92.

Dickens's satiric purposes, rather than giving the Barnacle history a logical and reasonable air, it suggests the essential capriciousness of the distribution of power in this society. Thus Dickens manages to take a feature absolutely characteristic of the most banal "real life" and, using it as a literary language, make it an incriminating parody of the mentality to which it is attached in the novel.

The descriptions of Tite Barnacle and his son are again a combination of palpably realistic detail belonging to their place as characters in a dramatic novel, and sardonic flourishes such as those which make Barnacle Junior resemble a floundering young bird(LD, Bk.1, Chp. 10, p. 78). The older Barnacle is likened to an eternal portrait sitter who had "wound and wound folds of tape and paper round the neck of the country"(LD, Bk.1, Chp.10, p. 80)--the allegorical point thereby being directly incorporated with the social demeanour. Analogously, the Barnacle office is said to have both "the pervading smell of leather and mahogany, and a general bamboozling air of How not to do it"(LD, Bk.1, Chp.10, p.79); the Barnacle home is given both a precise geographic location among the back lanes of Grosvenor Square and social slot, being "like a sort of bottle filled with a strong distillation of mews"(LD, Bk.1, Chp. 10, p.79).

Clennam's adventures among the passage-ways and back rooms of the Circumlocution Office might be a dramatization of the day described ostensibly by a former civil servant in "Cheap Patriotism":

I did all the usual things. I wasted as much writing-paper as I possibly could. I set up

all my younger brothers with public pen-knives. I took to modelling in sealing-wax (being hopeless of getting through the quantity I was expected to consume by any other means)...As to our ways of getting through the time, we used to stand before the fire, warming ourselves behind, until we made ourselves faint; and we used to read the papers; and, in hot weather, we used to make lemonade and drink it. We used to yawn a good deal, and ring the bell a good deal, and chat and lounge a good deal, and go out a good deal, and come back a little....[W]e used to take our revenge on the public by keeping it waiting and giving it<sup>25</sup> short answers, whenever it came into our office.

Against this monopoly, Clennam's persistent "I want to know" (LD, Bk.1, Chp.2, p.81) becomes a paradigm of the popular call of the Victorians at the time of the Crimean Inquiry for "The Reason Why," shown in Punch, for example, on 3 March 1855 (p.85). The representation of Clennam's encounter with bureaucracy culminates with Ferdinand Barnacle's account to Clennam of the experiences which lie before him:

You'll memorialise Department (according to regular forms which you'll find out) for leave to memorialise this Department. If you get it (which you may after a time), that memorial must be entered in that Department, sent to be registered in this Department, sent back to be signed by that Department, sent back to be countersigned by this Department, and then it will begin to be regularly before that Department. You'll find out when the business passes through each of these stages, by asking at both Departments till they tell you. (LD, Bk.1, Chp.2, p.84)

And with these Swiftian soarings into the ridiculous, the "sprightly" young Barnacle cheerfully waves Clennam out the door with a sheaf of forms.

Young Barnacle's account of the profusion and confusion of departments and forms is not unlike the account given by

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<sup>25</sup>Charles Dickens, "Cheap Patriotism," Household Words 11 (9 June 1855): 433.

the Duke of Newcastle to the Sebastopol Committee. In response to Austen Henry Layard's query about the use of "forms" under the Duke's supervision, the Duke told the Board that the difficulty was particularly troublesome in subordinate departments:

In the Medical Department, which was one of the worst cases, the head of that department was obliged, in order to obtain a supply of comforts and other things, to go through an immense circuit of offices, and frequently to repeat the process in converse order.<sup>26</sup>

And when Layard inquired about the frequency of what the Little Dorrit reader should term "Daniel Doyce" situations occurring within the Ordnance Department, Newcastle gave the opinion that such problems

did not arise from forms, properly speaking, but the public are under a misconception, natural enough, as to what office they should apply to. They frequently applied to the War-office, and were referred to another military department....The custom at the Ordnance, in cases of inventions, is to refer them to a committee at Woolwich.<sup>27</sup>

No doubt this was but a mild confirmation of the many anecdotes that Layard would have gathered personally by this time; this passage is noteworthy, not as a source--for that is squaring Dickens's thought processes rather too neatly--but as probably one of the most widely familiar formulations of the evils befalling England during this time. Dickens would have been one among many readers of The Times reports, though his own description of the public or "Nobody" confronting the array

<sup>26</sup>The Times, 25 April 1855, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup>The Times, 25 April 1855, p. 11.



of government departments is rather more piquant than that of poor Newcastle.

Clennam's encounter with Mr. Meagles and Daniel Doyce is conducted at a more subdued level than that with the Barnacles, although the fable of Doyce continues to reiterate the moral of Clennam's recent adventure and highlights another aspect of bureaucratic abuses. It was not the first time that Dickens had used this story to urge the need for administrative reform. In "The Toady Tree," among others who hold grievances against the government, there is a character named Hobbs who

had the misfortune, about fifteen years ago, to invent a very ingenious piece of mechanism highly important to dockyards, which has detained him unavailingly in the waiting-rooms of public offices ever since, and which was invented last month by somebody else in France, and immediately adopted there.<sup>28</sup>

Doyce, however, is not the toady that Hobbs is subsequently shown to be; but clearly the ignored inventor is a popular figure for inciting dissatisfaction.

The Illustrated London News for 3 March 1855--an issue full of articles on the theme of government mismanagement--devotes nearly a full page to the career of M. Minié, the inventor of the Minié rifle which was being used in the Crimean War. It tells how after initial troubles with the protocol-bound French army hierarchy, Minié's invention had been accepted and rewarded by the highest civil authorities,

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<sup>28</sup>Charles Dickens, "The Toady Tree," Household Words 11 (26 May 1855): 386.

and he was living as a national hero in his homeland instead of as an exile under some more enlightened foreign government:

There was no filtering of powers through endless offices, no delays of artillery committees. The accompanying Portrait will show that the inventor of the rifle now in course of adoption in the armies of Europe has been included in the Legion of Honour. The great Stephenson went to his grave an unrecognised man. Minie lives to enjoy the reward of his services -- a reward which his country is proud to give him.<sup>29</sup>

Another figure around whom similar controversy gathered was Rowland Hill, the inventor of penny postage and a civil servant in the Post Office; it was the example of his career that Dickens used in "A Curious Misprint in the 'Edinburgh Review'" (1 August 1857) to refute Stephen's article quibbling about the factual basis of Little Dorrit, in the Edinburgh Review.<sup>30</sup>

However, it is pertinent to note that in "The Toady Tree" the characterization of the inventor-figure Hobbs invokes the notion not only of the neglected genius, but also of the frustrated snob who, whatever his grievances, nonetheless aspires to converse socially with those very people who have snubbed him professionally:

"This Gordian knot of red tape," said Hobbs, "must be cut. All things considered, there never was such

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<sup>29</sup>The Illustrated London News 26 (3 March 1855): 216.

<sup>30</sup>Rosamund and Florence Davenport Hill, The Recorder of Birmingham: A Memoir of Matthew Davenport Hill (London: Macmillan, 1878) contains a letter written by Matthew Davenport Hill to Lord Brougham, calling Stephen's citing of Rowland Hill as an instance of the government's progressiveness, a mistake: "Indeed if Dickens had known the facts he might have made more of the Circumlocution Office." (14 August 1857), p. 333.

a people so abused as the English at this time, and there never was a country brought to such a pass. It will not bear thinking of--(Lord Joddle)." The parenthesis referred to a passing carriage, which Hobbs turned and looked after with the greatest interest. "The system," he continued, "must be totally changed. We must have the right man in the right place (Duke of Twaddleton on horseback) ...we must get rid as a nation of our ruinous gentility and deference to mere rank. (Thank you, Lord Edward, I am quite well. Very glad to have the honour and pleasure of seeing you. I hope Lady Edward is well. Delighted, I am sure.)"<sup>31</sup>

Although this connection is not incorporated into the character of Daniel Doyce himself, the neglect of Doyce reveals at work the complementary side of the Circumlocution Office-Society compact which bows down before the name of Merdle. To the degree that even Mr. Meagles, who remains a warm supporter of Doyce throughout, is shown to be capable of a similar degree of enthusiasm for discussing with Henry Gowan the genealogy of the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings back to the time when "Lady Jemima was the first daughter by the second marriage of the fifteenth Earl of Stiltstalking with The Honourable Clementina Toozellam" (LD, Bk.1, Chp.27, p.148). Whereas in "The Toady Tree" it is the behaviour of Hobbs which indicates the double standard of English society, in Little Dorrit it is the complementary fables of the careers of Doyce and Merdle, which suggest the decadence of a society that ignores the truly valuable intellect and worships the pernicious agent. Dickens's remark to Forster that "Society, the Circumlocution Office, and Mr. Gowan, are of course three parts of one idea and design" (Forster, Bk.8, Chp.1, p.625)

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<sup>31</sup>Dickens, "The Toady Tree": 386.

indicates the closeness of their relationship to one another.

The interdependence of the Merdle story with the notion of "Society" is well established in the first paragraphs of the chapter "Mr. Merdle's Complaint." Although the name of Merdle has subsequently become more familiar than Dickens's notion of "Society," it is apparent from the aforementioned letter to Forster that the latter was the first target of his satire: "I had the general idea...of the Society business before the Sadleir affair, but I shaped Mr. Merdle himself out of that precious rascality" (Forster, Bk.8, Chp.1, p.625). And, as already shown, his journalism and other letters bear out his greater preoccupation with English society as a whole, rather than the career of Sadleir.

The satire of Society follows a technique familiar to Dickens's readers, of endowing objects such as the houses of Harley Street, where the Merdles live, with animistic properties and, contrarily, their inhabitants with the features of their houses:

The expressionless uniform twenty houses, all to be knocked at and rung at in the same form, all approachable by the same dull steps, all fended off by the same pattern of railing, all with the same impracticable fire-escapes, the same inconvenient fixtures in their heads, and everything without exception to be taken at a high valuation--who has not dined with these? (LD, Bk.1, Chp. 21, p.180)

Similarly, no member at the Merdle gathering is described in psychological detail: the shorthand labels of "Bar," "Bishop," "Treasury," denote merely the different professional patterns of speaking, the clichéd rhetoric by which such

people are known and reported.

Dickens shows a fondness for the abstract nature of jargon right from the opening pages of Pickwick, and this would seem to be simply a mature development of that art, where it is not played with for its own sake, but incorporated into an overall critical and satirical view of the mentality of the people who use it. It is now the characters, and not the narrators of his novels, who employ it. Such passages tend to be something of set pieces, and the only narratively progressive elements in the chapter consists of the foreshadowing about Mr. Merdle's "Complaint"--melodramatic hints of a mystery to be revealed at a later time. In this sense the suicide of Merdle and its foreshadowing give progressive order and climax to a series of satirically illustrative scenes which otherwise might have been multiplied indefinitely.

A comparison with how Trollope also satirized Society in its reaction to a Merdle-figure--in Trollope's case, the figure of Melmotte in The Way We Live Now--sets off the pertinent features of Dickens's treatment. In both novels it is the obsequious reaction of English Society and society to the plutocrat which primarily interests the novelist; to this, Trollope also adds the crime of public hypocrisy, since, unlike Dickens, he openly asserts the fraudulence of Melmotte from the beginning, a fraudulence not only known to the author but also to the fictional Society which waits upon him.

The most noticeable difference between the first Merdle dinner party and the Melmotte Ball is the comparative starkness



and diagrammatic quality of Dickens's satirical writing. Trollope gives his characters names and families, while Dickens delineates merely "Bar," "Bishop," and "Horse Guards." In another Trollope novel which touches on the same subjects as Little Dorrit, The Three Clerks, there are characters such as a civil servant named Fidus Neverband, Mr. Nogo a reactionary M.P., Alphabet Precis a master bureaucratic phraseology, and Undecimus Scott a Scottish M.P. and financial speculator; but the best proof that Trollope's Weights and Measures is, in fact, "exactly antipodistic of the Circumlocution Office"<sup>32</sup> is the fact that the heroes of his tale are civil servants themselves, whose feelings before a Civil Service Examination Board are sympathetically rendered and whose fates before that Board are of direct dramatic consequence for the story. The unfortunate public does not figure as a character in this novel of the civil service, and therefore it is the inner workings, rather than the public image, of these offices which concerns Trollope.

In The Way We Live Now, there are even leisurely debates about the moral correctness of a Melmotte's career, such as the one between Mr. Booker and Lady Carbury, in Chapter Thirty:

"If a thing can be made great and beneficent, a boon to humanity, simply by creating a belief in it, does not a man become a benefactor to his race by creating that belief?"

"At the expense of veracity?", suggested Mr. Booker.

"At the expense of anything?" rejoined Lady Carbury with energy. "One cannot measure such men by the ordinary rule."

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<sup>32</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Three Clerks (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), I, 2.

"You would do evil to produce good?" asked Mr. Booker.  
 "I do not call it doing evil...."  
 "You are an excellent casuist, Lady Carbury."  
 "I am an enthusiastic lover of beneficent audacity,"  
 said Lady Carbury.<sup>33</sup>

Such passages add to the development of the speakers as personalities, as well as to the presentation of the issue being discussed; whereas Dickens's judgement of Merdle is implicit in the narrator's description. Thus, Dickens's account of the election of Merdle's stepson is rather more insistent in its disapproval than Trollope's lengthy and detailed account of Melmotte's election to the seat of Westminster:

Edmund Sparkler, Esquire, son-in-law of the eminent Mr. Merdle of world-wide renown, was made one of the Lords of the Circumlocution Office; and proclamation was issued, to all true believers, that this admirable appointment was to be hailed as a graceful and gracious mark of homage rendered by the grateful and gracious Decimus, to that commercial country--and all the rest of it, with blast of trumpet.  
 (LD, Bk. 2, Chp. 12, p. 428)

Finally, perhaps the most notable difference between these two authors' approaches to this theme, is that Trollope does include in the story of Melmotte's fall the inner thoughts and fears of the doomed man himself; we are told that he forms a resolve

that at no moment, either when alone, or in a crowd, or when suddenly called upon for words,--not even when the policemen with their first hints of arrest should

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<sup>33</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Way We Live Now (London: Chapman and Hall, 1875), I, p. 188.

come upon him,--would he betray himself by the working of a single muscle, or the loss of a drop of blood from his heart.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, we see only the public effects of a likely such resolve on the part of Merdle, who is shown to acquire the suicide weapon under the proprietous pretext of paying Fanny Sparkler a call. The mention of Melmotte's inner fears appeals to the reader's natural curiosity and instincts for empathy, which have already been aroused by similar treatment of the novel's other characters--in fact, Trollope's satire seems to function mainly by the omniscient narrator's intimate and fascinating knowledge of the inner rationalizations and hypocrisies. By comparison, Dickens's method relies on Merdle remaining a cipher, and on tension being created because of the mystery of his psychological motives.

This tension is melodramatic, and the visit of Merdle to his daughter-in-law resembles what has been termed a "melodrama of manner,"<sup>35</sup> where life is represented as a two-tiered arrangement of obscure causes being simultaneously symbolized and obscured by public behaviour. Thus, in going through these motions of a social call on Fanny Sparkler, Merdle meanwhile gazes "into the depths of his hat, as if he thought he saw something at the bottom" (LD, Bk. 2, Chp. 24, p. 529) and "looked all over the palms of both his hands as

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<sup>34</sup>Trollope, The Way We Live Now, II, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup>Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 133.

if he were telling his own fortune" (LD, Bk.2, Chp.24, p.530).

Such gestures

cannot themselves have the opacity, codification, or subtlety of those in a novel of manners. They exist rather to reach beyond, to violate the autonomy of their primary context, and to raise other, deeper issues: to raise from "beneath the boards" those "buried titans."<sup>36</sup>

The depiction of Fanny's own self-betrayal for power is one of the most melodramatic of such stories, the tension of which comes out in her contradictory behaviour towards her sister in "Taking Advice." The precise notation of actions such as pacing to-and-fro, and the dabbing of her sister's forehead, indicate its strong theatrical conceptualization. Fanny's ostensible posture is one of being counselled by Amy, but, in fact, the reader readily perceives that the intention of the scene is to reveal, firstly, Fanny's secret emotions as she carries through her participation in Society and, secondly, the evils of a system which can thus pervert and anguish a young consciousness. One thinks of Eugene Rastignac at the end of Père Goriot, now not only more learned in the abstruse subtleties of Parisian society, but equipped with a hardened resolve, forged by his witnessing of the death of old Goriot, to use his skills at social intrigue ruthlessly.

That Fanny should speak of making it "the business of my life," and feeling "driven" as though by her "fate" (LD, Bk.2, Chp.14, p.444), to oppose a woman who has merely snubbed her in conversation, indicates the great corruptive attraction

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<sup>36</sup>Brooks, p. 133.

and power implied in this conception of society. The same prevalence of toadying which corrupts young men who come in contact with Lord Decimus and the Circumlocution Office is here echoed on the feminine side: Fanny's cynicism may be more impassioned than theirs, but her ultimate freedom will be no greater. This is a more universalized presentation of the problem: the reader's focus shifts from the particularities of the Circumlocution Office to the ultimate passions which its existence inspires. Thus Dickens's satire seeks to move from a merely derivative documentation of a society's external manner and artifacts to the invocation of emotions no less powerful or introspective than a cri de coeur of the Romantics.

Taken as a whole, with references to all the threads it concludes, the ending to Little Dorrit is not a fairy-tale one. Although Dickens may have seemed to be directing the reader towards the triumph of the middle-class businessman's point of view, he stops short of effecting a consummate world-view out of Doyce and Clennam's personal happiness. Whatever he may have advocated as a speaker for the Administrative Reform Association, as a novelist he can offer no answers. As F.R. Leavis comments on the view which remarks Dickens's lack of a consistent political programme: "it is not a creative writer's business to be a theologian or a philosopher. Dickens communicates a profound insight into human nature, the human situation and human need; we have no right to ask anything else of a great artist."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 275.



One might alter Leavis' statement here to suggest that Dickens, in fact, shows his fundamental loyalty to the novelist's craft by this very refusal to distort his insight into the human world with neat solutions. The ending seems to share equally in the antipodal forces which Frank Kermode has seen as exerting a constant double pressure on the novelist's art: it has always been threatened on one side from "the need to mime contingency and from the other by the power of form to console."<sup>38</sup>

Clennam and Amy Dorrit get married on a morning in autumn, not spring, and afterwards go

down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and in shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar.  
(LD, Bk. 2, Chp. 34, p. 625)

The prosperous return of Daniel Doyce, the marriage of Clennam to Amy, the knowledge that Fanny Dorrit's children will receive a mother's care from their aunt, and Tip a sister's devotion, all "console" the reader, while the streets through which they pass after their wedding remind one of the contingencies which hang about human life everlastingly. The method inherent in art's reclamation of the world means, as Kermode says,

that the humanizing of the world's contingency cannot be achieved without a representation of that contingency. This representation must be such that it induces the proper sense of horror

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<sup>38</sup> Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 151.

at the utter difference, the utter shapelessness, and the utter inhumanity of what must be humanized. And it has to occur simultaneously with the as if, the act of form, of humanization, which assuages the horror.<sup>39</sup>

The threat of the society represented in Dickens's satirical articles, although ostensibly stronger than that of the novel, in fact, is the less memorable or distressing precisely because their theses are so rigorously circumscribed by fantasy; analogously, this is why the account of the Circumlocution Office is sufficiently formalized so as to dissemble the connections with its real life model. The language of that account, as it is given by the Barnacles, plays with the object being satirized, and thereby distances its threat. Similarly, so do the insights offered by the young Gowan, a relation of the Circumlocution Office on the Society side. Part of such characters' wit is derived from their apparently unembittered manner of downgrading the system of which they confess to be a part; their "philosophy" preserves the sham in their own persons, even as they disparage it generally.

The young Barnacle continues to wave forms before Clennam, and Gowan continues to accept commissions for his painting, even as they declaim Skimpole-like on the meretriciousness of it all. The exaggeration to which James Fitzjames Stephen took offence perhaps actually distances us from the real "horror" which is symbolized

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<sup>39</sup>Kermode, p. 145.

by Fanny Dorrit's career; and only to the degree that the marriage of Clennam and Amy seems to mitigate that pattern, can the reader feel at all reassured or "consoled" by the satire of Little Dorrit.

CHAPTER VII  
THE MEANING OF A LITERARY IDEA

From the notion that all narratives are fundamentally "persuasive," comparisons between the different narrative strategies of Dickens's fiction have led to questions about the relation which ideas and values bear to his writing. The relevance to advancement of the plot or illustration of character does not always account for the effectiveness of an episode. The meaning or value of a story cannot easily be substituted by an expository summary. Perhaps when we talk about a novel simply by reciting "and then and then and then," we give the best description possible. For in doing so we are faithful to the movement of narrative itself--however feebly or approximately. This is, in skeletal form, its "logic," its progression.

Again and again, we have noticed Dickens's power as a narrator, often quite in contrast to his ability to construct a plot. This seems to be largely due to the force of his imaginative participation in incidents around him. Chesterton describes this aptly when he says of Dickens,

"Among all the huge serial schemes of which we have spoken, it is a matter of wonder that he never started an endless periodical called 'The Street,' and divided it into shops. He could have written an exquisite romance called 'The Baker's Shop,' another called 'The Chemist's Shop,'" and so on.<sup>1</sup> Such a sensibility, one which in this way repeatedly invokes "the Romance of everyday life," is constituted precisely by a tendency to see every miscellaneous occurrence in the context of narrative, as if at the very moment of being observed, the incident were taking place within the progress of a story and inherently projected the existence of a past and a future, and an origin and an end. Does narrative--in particular, the narrative of a novel--sustain its own framework of meaning quite apart from the concepts and entities it may incorporate from other verbal and visual structures? For the sensibilities of writer and reader, an object or incident seen narratively becomes meaningful, and hence reassuring. The aberration consists of the apparently random artifact or life--and this is what narrative avoids or, in fact, denies. It constantly makes connections, if only by placing pictures or words side by side.

Such is the familiar movement of Dickens's mind as it plays over the world before him. Paradoxically, it may be that the very multiplicity of narratives which the virtuoso storyteller can spin so fluently out of the gratuitous

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<sup>1</sup> Chesterton, Charles Dickens, p. 120.



life around him means ultimately that he has to make a self-conscious effort to produce the larger connections required by a novel. For it is ironic that the clotting of the novel with many little beginnings and endings may eventually mean the loss of any overall sense of meaning, and lead, instead, to the sensations of discontinuity, repetition, and extraneousness.

In Sketches by Boz and Pickwick, the scenes and personalities which spontaneously compelled Dickens's eye and imagination appear in their discrete purity and singularity. The novels continue to be a record of such things, but also, of an increasing proficiency in length and organization of an overall structure. Where we may recapture a feeling of improvisation and plurality is in the perusal of the memorandum notebook which Dickens began to keep--perhaps also for the sake of that feeling--in his later career. The analysis of its contents brings us to the final reaches of the exploration of meaning in narrative: what is "the meaning of a literary idea"?<sup>2</sup>

"Hints for Books Written and Unwritten" (Forster's description, Bk.9, Chp.7) was apparently undertaken in January 1855, as noted by Dickens on the title page, and in use until perhaps just after September 1865, this being

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<sup>2</sup>Lionel Trilling, "The Meaning of a Literary Idea," The Liberal Imagination (1949; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 282.

from six months before the beginning of Little Dorrit to the completion of Our Mutual Friend. Beyond that, the last appended entry seems to refer to ideas for Edwin Drood, and some of the names listed are also used in that novel. Forster is our source for this broad dating of the notebook, and also the explanation that it was begun out of a sense of "strain upon his [Dickens's] invention which brought with it other misgivings":

Never before had his teeming fancy seemed to want such help; the need being less to contribute to its fulness than to check its overflowing; but it was another proof that he had been secretly bringing before himself, at least, the possibility that what had ever been his great support might some day desert him....He could no longer fill a wide-spread canvas with the same facility and certainty as of old; and he had frequently a quite unfounded apprehension of some possible breakdown, of which the end might be at any moment beginning. There came accordingly, from time to time, intervals of unusual impatience and restlessness, strange to me in connection with his home.

(Forster, Bk.8, Chp.2, p.637)

The chronic difficulty of concentration during this period--perhaps from natural entropy and personal unhappiness--may have induced not only a grasping after ideas but also an uncertainty about his retention of them. In the confusion, good ideas for stories might be improperly recalled or old ones mistakenly repeat themselves as new, and a notebook would perhaps regulate such inaccuracies. Thus Dickens will often append the words "Done in----" and/or cross out an entry with vertical lines, to indicate its use in the past. Still, the act of crossing out or ticking off entries may have been no more than a mechanical exercise performed at intervals when a cumulative number of entries could be

struck off and so provide a reassuring sense of achievement and method in his work. Nor, in fact, did it entirely prevent another appearance of the same idea later on; since, as will be shown subsequently, some of the ideas here are so central to Dickens's narrative imagination that they can be seen to have recurred throughout his career and compelled being told again and again.

It may have been the case that the notebook was started at a time when Dickens, in the state of domestic unhappiness at which Forster hints, feeling himself plagued by recurring doubts and regrets, tried to banish these by writing them down, and reassure himself as to how many truly creative ideas could occur to him. The convenient size of the notebook (5 3/4" x 7" and about 1" in thickness) suggests that he hoped to note down ideas as spontaneously as they occurred to him--spontaneity being perhaps an increasingly rare and cultivated pleasure for a middle-aged author. One cannot generalize about the reasons why authors turn to keeping notebooks: the need for the practice will vary at different stages in a writer's career.

One calls these entries "ideas for novels" in a general way, but unlike the entries of Henry James in his notebook, they certainly do not outline in toto Dickens's plots of his novels, nor are they his ideas about novel writing. The title page calls them "Memoranda," not "Hints" as Forster has it. They are written out on twenty-five pages (the book contains about two hundred pages), and in typescript form vary in

length from one to ten lines, the average consisting of approximately four lines, and between three and eight entries occurring on each page.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the entries vary quite a bit from one another and these variations can be roughly categorized as follows:

- a) Lists of names (numbering 238)<sup>4</sup> and titles (numbering 39; 5, 60) for ready use, and ticked after having been used, though not necessarily when used.
- b) A few short topics, in the form of places or persons, which may have been meant for use in Household Words or All the Year Round. Examples include: "An antiquary's house," "A Sale room," "A Post-Office"(20), "A Station Waiting-room," "A Physician's Waiting room," "A Vestryman," "A Briber"(24). Of these, only "Refreshments at Mugby" is shown as having been used; there is a total of twelve such entries.
- c) Brief notes for characters, often projecting a personality through dialogue. Some are obviously meant for greater development or emphasis than others and may even overlap into the next category of
- d) leading incidents for stories.

It will be primarily the last two kinds of entry which will be discussed here, focussing on particular instances of each in order to discover general features among them, and perhaps also to suggest a perspective on the general qualities of Dickens's fiction.

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<sup>3</sup>I am indebted to Professor K.J. Fielding for the typescript transcription of the notebook which he made in 1962 and which he has kindly made available to me.

Permission to quote material from the Memorandum Notebook has been received from the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection in The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

<sup>4</sup>These are found on pages 3, 22, and 23, of the notebook. Hereafter, the page of the notebook on which an entry is located will be shown in parentheses following its text.

Before moving on to this main focus, a few observations about the category of lists of names may be made. Unlike the phrases or sentences which make up the main type of entry, the very absence of auxiliary descriptive material around the lists of names (even the titles generally occur in the context of another memo) tends to make it difficult to piece together the terms of any analysis which would clarify their appeal for Dickens. Their attraction, being immediate and intuitive, must seem uncertain to another mind, although the listing of terminations--"-~~straw~~, -ridge, -brook, -bring, -ring, -ing, -ol, -ible, -sons" on the back of page three and "-straw, -ridge, -bridge, -brook, -bring, -ring, -ing" on page twenty-two--suggests that Dickens himself could dissect their appeal for him to some degree. To a reader's eye, however, only two patterns are discernible. Firstly, there are names which operate almost on a didactic level: "Harden, Merdle, Merden,"(3), "Tertius Jobber"(22), "Zephaniah Fury"(23)--where the names take on the meaning of the specific nouns and adjectives which they resemble. Secondly, others seem to mimic an English pattern of name favoured by Dickens: "Chivery," "Yerbury"(3), "Boffin," "Dibton," "Mulvey," "Skiffins"(4 verso).<sup>5</sup>

The position of the names in relation to the other memos

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<sup>5</sup>See Monod's comments on the names in Pickwick: "They already reveal Dickens's special preference for certain letters and combinations of letters in proper names: the vowel "i" (often repeated twice in the same name), the consonants "p," "k," and "w," the "le" ending, all have great attractions for him." (Dickens the Novelist, pp. 103-04).



is also puzzling: at first glance, names for Our Mutual Friend appear to be mixed in with pages of Little Dorrit memos. Looking more closely, in the first area of the memo book in which the names occur, one finds, as might be expected, important Little Dorrit names following on from Little Dorrit memoranda on page three. But on page two verso, a number of primarily Our Mutual Friend names face these Little Dorrit themes, and on page three verso, as well as a continuation from page three recto of names from Little Dorrit, there are names used in A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend.

One can only surmise that Dickens must have been trying to keep one area of the book set aside for names regardless of when or in what context they occurred. So that even after the first side (recto) of page three had been completed and Dickens had gone on in the notebook with further ideas, he must have turned back to the blank spaces surrounding page three whenever it was names that he specifically wished to record. This area around page three eventually became filled up and later, on pages twenty-two and twenty-three, there is another list consisting of those "Brought together from back of page 3" and more recent additions, including some copied out "from Privy Council Education Lists." In an area where Dickens was attempting demonstrably to be systematic, this nebulousness in the arrangement of the names emphasizes the uncertainties of dating each and every notebook entry, and one cannot attempt a priori to set out a rigid chronological scheme, but instead only to offer information, where possible,

about an entry, as it is being discussed.

The notebook was started six months before the writing of Little Dorrit was begun; thus, the first eleven pages were written sometime between January and June 1855; the twelfth page would seem to have been written at a later stage, in the course of writing the novel ("First sign of Little Dorrit's father failing and breaking down." "Arthur Clennam falling into difficulty and himself imprisoned in the Marshalsea."). The pages between fifteen and nineteen contain half-formed suggestions for Great Expectations and A Tale of Two Cities. The bottom of page nineteen and top of the twentieth page appear to mark the time of serious focus of thought on Our Mutual Friend, and the first note on page twenty-four ("As to the question whether I, Eugene, lying ill and sick even unto death,...") pinpoints a crisis late in the novel. Immediately following this, is a series of phrases listed--"A Vestryman/A Bribery/A Station Waiting-room/Refreshments at Mugby/A Physician's Waiting-room/The Royal Academy"--among which, only "Refreshments at Mugby" has a tick beside it. "Mugby Junction" was the Christmas Story for 1866, and George Dolby, Dickens's manager for some of the reading tours, wrote in his reminiscences of the tours, that the idea of "Mugby Junction" arose out of an incident at the train station in Rugby in April 1866.<sup>6</sup> The note would seem to have been recorded sometime between then

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<sup>6</sup>George Dolby, Charles Dickens as I Knew Him (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1885), pp. 29-31.

and the autumn of 1866, when the story was completed. And the following entry--"The old Child..."--would have been entered at some point between this time and 1869-70, when Dickens used it to describe Mr. Grewgious in Edwin Drood. All of which belies Forster's statement that Dickens never referred to the notebook after Our Mutual Friend.

Forster's biography is our first and fullest source of information about the memo book; and Edgar Johnson's biography does not revise Forster on the subject. Generally, Forster's reproduction takes liberties with many details of wording and punctuation, and especially the ordering of the memos. The memo about the ship and Tug, which begins the notebook, is placed seventh, as the last of the memoranda associated with Little Dorrit, and all the memos are grouped with others used in the same work or having a common theme, not chronologically, as they actually occur.

Similarly, some memos are run together and connecting phrases and words inserted, giving the impression that the various threads of his novels came to Dickens in full-blown seamless totality; and the lists of names, which occur on the third, fourth, twenty-second and twenty-third pages are pruned, mixed and bunched together at the end of the book. Such an arrangement merely mimics the final impression held by someone who has read the novels, whereas perusal of the memo book, in fact, shows a casualness and ill-assortedness, even confusion, with which the organization of the finished work of art contrasts all the more impressively.

Even the text given in the Nonesuch Press edition (1938) of the Letters (Vol. III) is merely taken from Forster; and until an accurate text of the notebook is available, critical discussion must be awkward to conduct.

Perhaps the most inclusive generalization which may be made about the entries is that the interest of many of the situations or appearances described turns on a point of incongruity, or even irony. Such incongruity may be exemplified as simply as that picture in the very first entry, of "The unwieldy ship, taken in tow by the snorting little steam Tug"(1), recorded as being "Donein Casby and Panks"<sup>[sic]</sup> in Little Dorrit. When Casby is introduced into the fourth monthly part of the Little Dorrit number plan, this image is easily slotted in, with the names "Panx-Pancks" following afterwards. Besides the humorous appeal of describing human beings in this inanimate relation, it perfectly reflects the ironies of their true relationship and its representation: the tug boat which hauls a big ship, although ostensibly in the leading position, is, in fact, always acting as a convenient device at the direction of the ship. This is also the logic of the second entry--"The drunken? - dissipated? - what?--Lion - and his Jackall and Primer - stealing down to him at unwonted hours"(1)--which eventually describes the relation in A Tale of Two Cities between Mr. Stryver and Sydney Carton.<sup>7</sup> Here again, the visible evidence of the

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<sup>7</sup>Charles Dickens, "A Tale of Two Cities," All the Year Round 1 (11 June 1859): 147-49.

relationship is, rather, the reverse of its truth.

The inclusion of this last entry among entries most associated with Little Dorrit suggests that in this form many of the ideas attracting Dickens's eye were by no means integral in origin to a specific novel or story. With reference to the novel's development of the Casby-Pancks relationship, one can never know how much of their entire presentation in the novel was in fact derived from the vignette of ship and tugboat, for it seems as if it had a self-sufficient visual appeal for Dickens. The relation of Stryver and Carton was described in the terms of both these entries: the lion and jackal metaphor occurs in the fifth chapter of the second book; in the twenty-first chapter of the same book, "Echoing Footsteps," we read that "Mr. Stryver shouldered his way through the law, like some great engine forcing itself through turbid water, and dragged his useful friend in his wake, like a boat towed astern."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the appeal of the tug and ship image for Dickens seems to have existed quite apart from the peculiar characters or novel to which it might be applied.

If we accept that Dickens was not yet reduced to grasping at "happy" similes, we must believe that at the moment of inception such images were felt to be integrally expressive of a key situation, an autonomous narrative and significance. The narrative which develops out of,

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<sup>8</sup>Dickens, "A Tale of Two Cities," All the Year Round 1 (27 August 1859): 409.



and perhaps finally incorporates, this image, and the characters which vivify it, will extend this meaning which Dickens wishes to communicate; to the reader it may appear that the image is subordinate to the story or the cumulative presentation of the characters, and while this is finally an entirely proper perception, the entries of the memoranda notebook suggest a reversed perspective, in which story and character are seen to be derivatives of the image's logic. Ultimately, the scene or character which had its germ in the image may come to exist in its own right for author and reader, but the image which sustains this existence has itself a feeling or statement to convey, which will be evoked every time it is used.

Thus, the third memo found in the notebook--"'The office' The life of the office. The men in it."--could have suggested either the Household Words article "Cheap Patriotism" (9 June 1855), where the inside view of a government office is the focus for political satire, or the Circumlocution Office chapter of Little Dorrit, or both. As critics have commented, there are many figures which could have appeared interchangeably in any of the novels or journalism--a type of remark which is sometimes meant to imply the undesirable looseness of Dickens's writing. In fact, the first page of the notebook and those following, up to the ninth page, intermingle in almost equal proportions the leading ideas and names of characters for Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, and Our Mutual Friend; yet there is nothing to explain why Little Dorrit should have drawn on them in the next six months, and Our Mutual Friend,

nearly ten years later. Nor, in fact, is it clear why such descriptions should become narratives, and how these narratives establish their peculiar durations in the novels.

In varying lengths and quantities these descriptions cum narratives add to the sheer density and allusiveness of the novels; images such as the simple ones discussed above are, of course, the type of thing which go to project what is commonly called "the Dickens world," the sense of life and wealth of poetic detail which pushed him into early prominence and which absolutely characterize Sketches by Boz.

Other entries here which could easily have appeared twenty years earlier in the Sketches are:

Buying poor shabby - father? - a new hat. So incongruous, that it makes him like an African King Boy, or King George; who is usually full dressed in a cocked hat or a waistcoat - and nothing else.  
(1)

or

The uneducated father (or uncle?) in fustian, and the educated boy in spectacles. Whom Leech and I saw at Chatham.  
(6)

Of the first, Forster comments that "A touch for Bella Wilfer is here" (Forster, Bk.9, Chp.7, p.750), and the second suggests Gaffer and Charley Hexam in Our Mutual Friend.

Even the most inconsequent details catch Dickens's eye and are felt to have interest:

Found Drowned. The descriptive bill upon the wall, by the waterside.  
(8)

This is recorded as being "Done in our Mutual," referring to the placard at Whitehall which John Harmon sees describing

himself as dead.<sup>9</sup> And, three entries later we find:

A "long shore" man-woman-child-or family. (Two words crossed through.) Qy. Connect the Found Drowned Bill with this.  
(8)

Which is how it does occur in the novel. The "Found Drowned" bill also turns up elsewhere: John Harmon sees the bill describing him, at Whitehall; but Arthur Clennam, returning home from China at the beginning of Little Dorrit, wanders down by Cheapside and the river,

passing silent warehouses and wharves, and here and there a narrow alley leading to the river, where a wretched little bill, FOUND DROWNED, was weeping on the wet wall.  
(LD, Bk.1, Chp.3, p.23)

An even earlier instance occurs in Bleak House, when Esther is on the last search for her mother, and she sees down by the river "a bill, on which I could discern the words, 'FOUND DROWNED;' and this, and an inscription about Drags, possessed me with the awful suspicion shadowed forth in our visit to that place"(BH,676). Dickens seems not to have remembered or thought it important to record this use or the instance in Little Dorrit; although these may be the more factual settings of the entry, its narrative significance is less developed in them. Thus, we see demonstrated the potential ramifications of one description, whether they be of leading structural importance or mere allusive interest.

As if to emphasize the point of interchangeability, there occurs one entry in the notebook which can be said,

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<sup>9</sup>Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (London: Chapman and Hall, 1865), Bk.2, Chp. 13, p. 283.

figuratively speaking, to have caught Dickens's eye at the beginning of his career; for when we read about "The man who marrys [sic] his cook at last, after being so desperately knowing about the sex" (7), we might recall the ending of "The Misplaced Attachment of Mr. John Dounce" in the Sketches, where John Dounce, an "old boy" who generally confines his attentions regarding women to making sly asides to men friends, is suddenly struck by a matrimonial fever to make offers

successively to a schoolmistress, a landlady, a feminine tobacconist, and a housekeeper; and, being directly rejected by each and every of them, was accepted by his cook, with whom he now lives, a henpecked husband, a melancholy monument of antiquated misery,<sup>10</sup> and a living warning to all uxorious old boys.

Nonetheless, any previous or future use of this idea remains unremarked in the notebook.

This leads us to another element outstanding about Dickens's sketches, both in the eighteen-thirties and here in these of the eighteen-fifties: if Dickens's imagination is frequently caught by the type of naturalistic incongruities seen above (which may be of the humorous or pathetic sort) he is hardly less observant of incongruities in the quality of life or manners in the artificial setting of Society. Since the beginning of his writing career, Dickens's fiction had been noted for the acuteness and quantity of its detail: such is "the Dickens world," and the trouble over details is a major constituent of its tendency to fall into paradox.

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<sup>10</sup>Dickens, Sketches by Boz (1839), pp. 265-66.

Many physical discrepancies or paradoxes are found in the life of the London streets; many moral "incongruities" similarly compose the life of English society. And this world, with all its gaps between speech and behaviour, is no less "Dickensian." It is familiar to us in these notebook entries because of their development in Little Dorrit and Our Mutual Friend:

Our house. Whatever it is, it is in a first rate situation and a fashionable neighbourhood. (Auctioneer called it "a gentlemanly residence.") A series of little closets squeezed up into the corner of a dark street--but a Duke's Mansion round the corner. The whole house just large enough to hold a vile smell. The air breathed in it at the best of times, a kind of Distillation of Mews.  
[Done in the Barnacles.]  
 (1)

The man whose vista is always stopped up by the image of Himself. Looks down a long walk, and can't see round himself, or over himself, or beyond himself. - Is always blocking up his own way. - Would be such a good thing for him, if he could knock himself down. - And by denying a thing, supposes that he altogether puts it out of existence.  
[Done in Podsnap]  
 (4)

Miss C. B. The enthusiastically complimentary person, who forgets you in her own flowery prosiness, as - "I have no need to say to a person of your genius and feeling, and wide range of experience;" - and then being illegible short-sighted puts up her glass, to remember who you are.  
 (4)

Sensible men enough, agreeable men enough, independent men enough in a certain way, - but the moment they begin to circle round My Lord and to shine with a borrowed light from His Lordship, Heaven and Earth how mean and subservient! What a competition and outbidding of each other in servility!

Full length Portrait of His Lordship, surrounded by Worshippers.  
 (8)

I affect to believe that I would do anything myself for a Ten Pound Note, and that anybody else would. I affect to be always book-keeping in every man's case, and posting up a little account of Good and Evil with every one. Thus the greatest rascal becomes "the dearest



old fellow", and there is much less difference than you would be inclined to suppose between an honest man and a Scoundrel. While I affect to be finding good in most men, I am in reality denying it where it really is, and setting it up <illegible> where it is not.

Done in Dorrit

(9)

The woman who is never on any account to hear of anything shocking. For whom the world is to be of barley-sugar.

(11)

The House-full [sic] of Toadies and Humbugs. They all know and despise one another: but - partly to keep their hands in, and partly to make out their own individual cases - pretend not to detect one another.

(17)

The swell establishment, frightfully mean and miserable in all but the "reception Rooms". Those very showy.

(18)

The perfectly New people. Everything new about them. If they presented a father and mother, it seems as if they must be bran new, like the furniture and the carriages, shining with varnish, and just home from the manufacturer's.

(20)

What it is to have had a "distinguished" relation! Field T. claims to be Frank T.!

(21)

Some of these entries not familiar to us from the novels still partake of that quality of allusiveness and ironic observation which has always been associated with Dickens. In the few words which go to make up an entry, he can give the reader a precise description of a whole operative mannerism --the form it takes and the mentality it reveals, as for example, in:

The lady, un peu passée, who is determined to be interesting. No matter how much I love that person --nay, the more so for that very reason--I must flatter and bother, and be weak and apprehensive and nervous and what not. If I were well and strong, agreeable and self-denying, my friend might forget me.

(5)

How easily, one feels he could have slipped such a personality

into a paragraph, garnished with a little dialogue; how much it recalls the observant notation of people's pretensions in the Sketches. Dickens's characteristic manner is quite the reverse of those people whom he lampoons in another entry:

The people who persist in defining and analyzing their and everybody else's moral qualities, motives, and what not, at once in the narrowest spirit and the most lumbering manner; as if one should put up an enormous scaffolding for the building of a pigstye.

(17)

In the notebook, the browser views a small and amusing cross-section, rather like that found in Kenny Meadows' Heads of the People (1840-41), of the stereotyped personalities which frequented Victorian drawing rooms.

Obviously Dickens notes down such phenomena out of something more emphatic than genial curiosity, and they are perhaps not quite as disparate as might first be assumed; in the novels such as Little Dorrit and Our Mutual Friend he organizes out of this aspect of life, an entire fabric of unified significance. The novels exemplify Dickens's powers of organization as a conscious artist; but the memo book records the typical themes or preoccupations of the man who is also an artist. Ultimately the memos possess coherence because they were all recorded by a single mind. They are conjoined at the very least in the context of Dickens's identity. Hence they share a very simple basis for the later, more complex, manner of integration. The novelist perhaps only finds words and structural connections to rationalize the first intuitive associations of the man: "the Dickens world" denotes both the constructive skill of the artist and the instinctive affinities of the personality.

In Little Dorrit, the pretentious house smelling of mews, the overly effusive woman and the barley-sugar Mrs. Grundy figure, the supercilious man, become symbols, representative, respectively, of a corrupt system of government which wrongs citizens like Daniel Doyce and Arthur Clennam, a sterile social system which produces permanently unhappy consequences for Fanny Dorrit; and the seducer who crosses the lives of Pet Meagles and those who love her. The last might seem to be unusual language by which to invoke the weak fortune-hunter type of Henry Gowan, but Dickens plausibly works up Gowan's significance to this degree in Miss Wade's account of how he blasted her own early life and hopes:

In his light protestations of admiration of my future husband, in his enthusiasm regarding our engagement and our prospects, in his hopeful congratulations on our future wealth and his despondent references to his own poverty--all equally hollow, and jesting, and full of mockery--I saw it clearly. He made me feel more and more resentful, and more and more contemptible, by always presenting to me everything that surrounded me, with some new hateful light upon it, while he pretended to exhibit it in its best aspect for my admiration and his own. He was like the dressed-up Death in the Dutch series; whatever figure he took upon his arm, whether it was youth or age, beauty or ugliness, whether he danced with it, sang with it, played with it, or prayed with it, he made it ghastly.

(LD, Bk.2, Chp.21, pp. 505-06)

Thus an apparently idle social mannerism is seen to have far-reaching effect. That Dickens meant to make his case strongly is confirmed by a letter to Forster in which, speaking of the idea of the Gowan-figure, he asks, "Might not a presentation of this far from uncommon class of character, if I could put it strongly enough, be likely to lead some men to reflect, and change a little? I think it has never been done"(Forster, Bk.9,

Chp.6, p.748).

In the novel, figures such as Mrs. Merdle and Henry Gowan are able to act directly upon other characters in significant ways because they have been conceived both as representations of general patterns and as self-sufficient personalities. From the memoranda and Dickens's remarks in his letters, we see that their conception originally lay in the analysis of types, and in the immediate present tense of the novel's action the speech patterns of such characters reveal the leading idea which animates their behaviour. Secondly, it is in the overall structural pattern of the novel, that is, in its historical chronology rather than its immediate moments, that these characters also come to have their effect as agents in the story. Thus, Mrs. Merdle is not only the typical woman who cannot remember who she is talking to: she is someone, who by such a manner, provokes Fanny Dorrit into taking the tragic resolution to marry the Sparkler. Henry Gowan is not just a supercilious talker: he is the figure who leads the Meagles and their daughter finally into the realm of pathos, where the reader's sympathies are strongly aroused. In this way, these figures and the "ideas" behind them are organized and translated into the emotionally evocative realm of fictional experience.

In Our Mutual Friend, the entry for "The perfectly New people" is simultaneously dramatized in manners and conversation as the Veneerings and expanded into the principle of superficial value. The Veneering dinner parties found at intervals throughout the novel are not only self-contained plays upon the conceit of the nouveau riche but also a cumulative history of moral indictment. "Podsnappery" is probably the best example



of this phenomenon: where the Podsnap figure, who in these notes is merely one of self-righteousness becomes representative of the insular and prescriptive Englishman, a system unto himself. The first two paragraphs of the eleventh chapter, "Podsnappery," develop as the two parts of the memorandum notion, the self-satisfaction and the easy dismissal of problems, respectively. In the third paragraph, Dickens goes on to show how this pompous censorship of objects and opinions foreign to such a mind actually leads into antagonism to concretely foreign entities:

Mr. Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, "Not English!" when PRESTO! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away.... These may be said to have been the articles of a faith and school which the present chapter takes the liberty of calling, after its representative man, Podsnappery. They were confined within close bounds, as Mr. Podsnap's own head was confined by his shirt-collar; and they were enunciated with a sounding pomp, that smacked of the creaking of Mr. Podsnap's own boots.<sup>11</sup>

This description culminates in the dinner-party encounter of Podsnap with the foreigner,<sup>12</sup> and in that passage Dickens manages to combine the specific exclusion of things geographically foreign with a general evocation of moral narrowness. The manners mark an Englishman both nominally and morally: "Podsnappery" is one way of signifying a race--not in the first

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<sup>11</sup>Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, Bk.1, Chp.11, pp. 97,98.

<sup>12</sup>See letter to Count d'Orsay, PL,IV,597; 5 August 1846, where Dickens describes a similar encounter which he observed while abroad.



instance necessarily a national one--of morally deficient people; while because it is specifically English manners which are used to characterize Podsnappery, the real English, thus unmistakably denoted by their manners in this passage, are by implication also being criticized in moral terms. And it is not unwarranted to think that Dickens's satirical targets include the specifically national, as well as the moral, race.

Such a process can be applied in varying degrees: the "Worshippers" around "His Lordship," while cleanly and memorably rendered in a couple of Society-and-Circumlocution-Office chapters in Little Dorrit, are not worked up as palpable characters in the same way as "The House-full of Toadies and Humbugs" becomes the Pocket relatives who play a morally significant role in Pip's career of great expectations:

There were three ladies in the room and one gentleman. Before I had been standing at the window five minutes, they somehow conveyed to me that they were all toadies and humbugs, but that each of them pretended not to know that the others were toadies and humbugs: because the admission that he or she did know it would have made him or her out to be a toady and humbug.<sup>13</sup>

It is a debatable point as to whether this observation is consistent more with the adult writer than the child at the window: perhaps it is only the adult reader who notices the satiric quality of the Pockets, who otherwise first seem of a piece with the foreboding atmosphere of Satis House. As George Orwell writes of the similar reduction of the Murdstones in David Copperfield, who "dwindle from gigantic figures of doom into semi-comic monsters," "Dickens has been able to

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<sup>13</sup>Charles Dickens, "Great Expectations," All the Year Round 4 (12 January 1861): 313.

stand both inside and outside the child's mind, in such a way that the same scene can be wild burlesque or sinister reality, according to the age at which one reads it."<sup>14</sup>

This is a dimension quite unaccounted for by the memorandum intention of lampooning pretentiousness; the intensity of feeling connected with these figures is not to be found in their ridiculous speeches.

This is what can be observed in general about the use in the novels of all the socially satirical memoranda: that the "idea" behind them manifests itself not just in individually brilliant scenes of dialogue and manners, but as part of an entire plot structure which expresses Dickens's ultimate verdict on such people. This judgement is implicit in the "idea" recorded in the notebook, yet is finally made explicit by the way it is developed in the structural patterning of the whole work.

Nonetheless, there is a distinction to be noted between these structures and those which Dickens singled out as leading ideas for actual stories; and it is the latter for which every Dickens reader would probably look most eagerly upon first coming to the notebook and the consideration of a writer's creative processes.

At the head of the notebook's second page, for example, there is an entry reading:

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<sup>14</sup>George Orwell, The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (1968; Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books, 1970), I, 465.

Beginning with the breaking up of a large party of guests at a country house--house left lonely with the shrunken family in it--guests spoken of, and introduced to the reader in that way.

Which is referred by an "X" to another entry opposite, on the back of page one:

X Or, beginning with a house abandoned by a family fallen into reduced circumstances. Their old furniture there, and numberless tokens of their old comforts. Inscriptions under the bells downstairs. "Mr. John's room" - "Miss Caroline's room." Great gardens trimly kept to attract a tenant - but no one in them -- a landscape without figures. Billiard Room; table covered up, like a body. Great stables without horses, and great coach houses without carriages. Grass growing in the chinks of the stone paving, this bright cold winter day. < Two words crossed through > Downhills.

Forster wrongly records this entry as never having been used --whether he deduced this by anything more than the fact that there was no vertical line drawn through it, is not certain. "Downhills" is an unhelpful reference. But the details given seem to correspond with those found in the Christmas Story of 1859, "The Haunted House," which eventually turns into quite a different sort of tale. It is a story in two parts, and while the first half develops the theme of the haunting in a predictable manner, including the idea of a house party on the lookout for ghosts, the second half veers oddly towards something between veiled autobiography and an Arabian fantasy. One wonders how much of this was based on Dickens's experience of encountering the Gadshill house once more in 1855 as a potential buyer.

Other entries which are announced explicitly as being ideas for entire stories include:

The idea of a story beginning in this; - two people-boy and girl, or very young - going apart from one another, pledged to be married after many years--at the end of the

book. Their interest to arise out of the tracing of their separate ways, and the impossibility of telling what will be done with that impending Fate.  
(16)

And

Open a story by bringing two strongly contrasted places and strongly contrasted sets of people, into the connexion necessary for the story, by means of an electric message. Describe the message--be the message--flashing along through space--over the earth, and under the sea.  
(19)

And

Leading Incident for a story. A man--young and eccentric--~~feigns to be dead,~~ and is dead to all intents and purposes external to himself, and for years retains that singular view of life and characters.  
Done Rokesmith.  
(19)

These entries occur after the bulk of those concerning Little Dorrit; and Forster's comments on the second entry induce the assumption that it refers to A Tale of Two Cities. And yet it is not crossed out by vertical lines and appears to have been used only in the loosest way in that book: perhaps in the sense of the opening chapter, where the states of England and France are compared in the year 1785, and mention is made of the spiritual (Cock-lane ghost rapping) and earthly (American assertion of independence from England) currents of the time; or perhaps in the second chapter, where the mail coach travelling between London and Dover is halted by an express message from France to its passenger Jarvis Lorry, and to which he gives the strangely abstract reply "Recalled to Life."

In an even looser sense one might also think of the coming together of all the travellers in the second chapter of Little Dorrit; or of the ghastly message "Found Drowned"

in Our Mutual Friend which brings together the waterside characters of the first chapter and the Society characters of the second.

The notion of the message being electric is never employed directly, and if the first chapter of A Tale of Two Cities might have seemed to offer the most likely openings for such a device, the chosen historical setting would have ruled out its specific inclusion. Forster says that the notion for A Tale of Two Cities occurred to Dickens while acting in The Frozen Deep (Forster, Bk.9, Chp.2, p.726); in fact, Dickens wrote to Miss Coutts on 5 September 1857, saying: "Sometimes of late, when I have been very excited by the crying of two thousand people over the grave of Richard Wardour, new ideas for a story have come into my head as I lay on the ground with surprising forward brilliance. Last night, being quiet here, I noted them down in a little book I keep" (NL,II,876).<sup>15</sup> This may or may not make it possible to put a date of 4 September 1857 to the entry about the electric message; but perhaps Dickens had been thinking at the time, about an earlier experience, which is described in a letter written twenty months previously, to Mark Lemon and which may indicate a contributing source:

In a piece at the Ambigu, called the Rentrée à Paris, a mere scene in honour of the return of the troops from the Crimea the other day, there is a novelty which I think it worth letting you know of, as it is easily available, either for a serious or a comic interest --the introduction of a supposed electric telegraph. The scene is the railway terminus at Paris, with the

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<sup>15</sup>See George H. Ford, "Dickens's Notebook and Edwin Drood," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 6 (March 1952): 275.



electric telegraph office on the prompt side, and the clerks with their backs to the audience--much more real than if they were, as they infallibly would be, staring about the house--working the needles; and the little bell perpetually ringing. There are assembled to greet the soldiers, all the easily and naturally imagined elements of interest--old veteran father, young children, agonised mother, sisters and brother, girl lovers--each impatient to know of his or her own object of solicitude. Enter to these a certain marquis, full of sympathy for all, who says: "My friends, I am one of you. My brother has no commission yet. He is a common soldier. I wait for him as well as all brothers and sisters here wait for their brothers. Tell me whom you are expecting." Then they all tell him. Then he goes into the telegraph-office, and sends a message down the line to know how long the troops will be. Bell rings. Answer handed out on slip of paper. "Delay on the line. Troops will not arrive for a quarter of an hour." General disappointment. "But we have this brave electric telegraph, my friends," says the marquis. "Give me your little messages, and I'll send them off." General rush round the marquis. Exclamations: "How's Henri?" "My love to Georges:" "Has Guillaume forgotten Elise?" "Is my son wounded?" "Is my brother promoted?" etc. etc....

As I have said, and as you will see, this is available for any purpose. But done with equal distinction and rapidity, it is a tremendous effect, and got by the simplest means in the world. There is nothing in the piece, but it was impossible not to be moved and excited by the telegraph part of it.  
(NL.II,722-23; 7 January 1856)

The entry in the notebook, perhaps triggered from this and the later experience in The Frozen Deep, concentrates more on the physical phenomenon of the telegraph, planning to fill in the human figures and uses later--a reversal of the process generally observed with these memoranda and perhaps finally not a particularly memorable strategy. The curiosity value of the telegraph on stage was not translated into a fictional medium, though Dickens clearly thought it could be, and one can only remark how artificially derivative some of Dickens's ideas could be.

The appeal of the first and third entries under discussion

is very different and was developed later, specifically in Edwin Drood and Our Mutual Friend. In fact, the third is followed by the notion of the Lammles and the phrase "Our Mutual Friend." The first, situated among a group of very diverse and apparently unused memoranda, seems not to have been crossed off, and yet it readily recalls the situations of Edwin Drood and Rosa Bud, or John Harmon and Bella Wilfer; the description of the marriage as "an impending Fate" coincides with the mournful aspect in which these unions are introduced, and as shown above, its likely date makes it eligible for inclusion in either novel. That the interest is "to arise out of the tracing of their separate ways" perhaps remains closest to our sense of the relationship in Edwin Drood: here, after the initial sense of the pledge's weight is impressed upon the reader, one waits with a curiosity (alas, never satisfied) to discover where Drood will go after the couple separate themselves; by contrast, in Our Mutual Friend the period of separation has passed without depiction and the interest centres on the manner by which they will fulfill that fate. In a shorthand and perhaps unexpected way its fulfillment is combined with the idea of the third entry.

Disgusted with the place in life designated for him by his father long ago, and reluctant to fulfill that Fate, the young man Harmon resolves to resume life and business in England, but through a stroke of chance discovers he can accomplish it without the encumbrance of the old identity. It would seem that he seizes ~~this~~ chance, not to avoid personal responsibility, since he attends to the business

thoroughly in his capacity as Rokesmith the secretary, but rather, to test the loyalty of former friends. For Dickens, the interest of such a situation seems to be encapsulated in the speculation "If the dead could know, or do know, how the living use them. Harmon muses first on the inward sensation produced by his peculiar status:

"It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals," said he, "to be looking into a churchyard on a wild windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here. Nothing uses me to it. A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognized among mankind, than I feel.

Although, he quickly moves on from this, saying:

"But this is the fanciful side of the situation. It has a real side, so difficult that, though I think of it every day, I never thoroughly think it out.<sup>16</sup>

As his ruminations following his account of the events show, the solemn perplexities of the "real side" hang on the decision to be taken as to whether or not to continue in this identity, and the consequences either choice would mean to the people who are attached to him. It is along such lines that the memorandum conceit is fleshed out: if it was "the fanciful side" which comprised Dickens's first conception of the matter, in the novel itself it is chiefly the "real," the density of characters and their common intercourse with one another, of moral and psychological fabric of the novel's life, which comes to signify the idea's speculative interest.

Reinforcing this sense, we might note another use of this same idea in the story Hunted Down. There, the climax of the story consists of the revelation by the drunkard

Beckwith, supposedly being unwittingly plotted to his death by the villain Slinkton, that he is in reality the young actuary Meltham already believed by Slinkton to be dead by a successful similar plot. In fact, Meltham had allowed Slinkton, the man who most desired his death, to believe his extinction achieved, in order that Meltham in turn might accomplish Slinkton's own defeat:

"That man, Meltham," Beckwith steadily pursued, "was as absolutely certain that you could never elude him in this world, if he devoted himself to your destruction with his utmost fidelity and earnestness, and if he divided the sacred duty with no other duty in life, as he was certain that in achieving it he would be a poor instrument in the hands of Providence, and would do well before Heaven in striking you out from among living men. I am that man, I thank GOD that I have done my work!"<sup>17</sup>

In relinquishing his real identity, there is no suggestion that Meltham had been interested in his unique position for any reasons other than those pertaining to his moral purposes. It is a "singular view of life" but one firmly bound up with the moral categories of ordinary life.

But, in fact, this idea of Meltham's revenge, an equally singular resolution to be taken by a young man, has two memos of its own in the notebook, one found on the eighth page among notes eventually used for Little Dorrit:

Devoted to the destruction of a man. Revenge built up on Love. The Secretary in the Wainwright case who had fallen in love (or supposed he had), with the murdered girl. [Done in Hunted Down.]

And the physical characterization of the villain Slinkton can be matched with a later memorandum of:

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Dickens, "Hunted Down," All the Year Round 3 (11 August 1860): 426.



The man with his hair parted, straight up the front of his head, like an aggravating gravel-walk. Always presenting it to you. "Up here, if you please. Neither to the right nor left. Take me exactly in this direction. Straight up here. 'Come off the grass!'" Done in Hunted Down. (13)

The mention of the "Wainwright case" in the earlier memo reminds us in how many points this story echoes the details of the notorious history of Thomas Griffiths Wainwright (1794-1852), a would-be literary figure and painter who was finally transported to Australia for the poisoning of his sister-in-law, Helen Abercromby, in 1826 and suspected poisonings of his mother-in-law, wife's uncle, and an acquaintance before that. On 27 June 1837 Dickens, in the company of Forster and Macready, visited Newgate where Wainwright was being held before transportation; Macready recognized the man, who ten years earlier, had been a familiar of his artistic and social circle, and Dickens remembered, nearly twenty years later, enough of this man's history to write Hunted Down. During the intervening years, the Wainwright case had remained notorious, and Dickens received reminders of the story at social occasions in 1846 and 1847, and in articles published in the British Quarterly Review of 1848 and the Examiner (19 January 1850). In December 1846 Bulwer Lytton published Lucretia or The Children of Night, a book incorporating many of the details of the case.<sup>18</sup> Like Slinkton, Wainwright had plotted his crimes in order to collect on the insurance policies which he had earlier taken

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<sup>18</sup> Among a number of books dealing with Wainwright's biography is Jonathan Curling's Janus Weathercock: The Life of Thomas Griffiths Wainwright 1797-1852 (London: Thomas Nelson 1938) which devotes a separate chapter to Dickens's use of Wainwright's case, including, for instance, the depiction of the villains Rigaud and Jonas Chuzzlewit.



out in his victims' names; and Dickens sets up his story from the point of view of an insurance clerk who has drawn up these policies and who in retirement recalls "one of these Romances of the real world."<sup>19</sup> For, however remarkable Wainewright's own history was, Dickens chose to focus on the actions and motivation of a peripheral and less sensational character.

There was an official of one of the insurance companies which was being prosecuted in 1830 by Madeleine Abercromby for non-payment of her sister's policy, named Henry P. Smith, who may have tricked Wainewright while in prison into revealing the location in France of personal papers, with the offer that the insurance companies would help get Wainewright freed on a forgery charge in return for his help against Madeleine's suit. Smith travelled to France and recovered these papers (now lost); among them was rumoured to be a diary kept by Wainewright, showing his plot. Bulwer Lytton contacted Smith when working on his novel and Smith lent him the Wainewright papers as well as writing him two letters in May 1856, matter-of-factly setting out what he knew--undoubtedly, Dickens would have been aware of these, and may even have taken the opening voice of his story from reading these letters. Smith had been a member for a long while of the circle which included Macready, Macclise, Bulwer, and was close enough to Dickens for the latter to ask him to be a godfather to two of his children, as well as to conduct his insurance affairs for him (PL.II, 251-52n; 5 April 1841). To what degree Smith's

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<sup>19</sup>Dickens, "Hunted Down," All the Year Round 3 (4 August 1860): 397.

actions may have been motivated by a passion for Helen Abercromby remains unknown.

Hunted Down was first published in 1859; the Wainewright entry on page eight was written before Little Dorrit was begun, and later entries on page nineteen, about the masquerade of death, before the writing of Our Mutual Friend. There are three facets of this story and its memos to be distinguished here: the amply documented historical background peculiar to Hunted Down's own memos; the notion of love's revenge, which may be partly historically true and partly fictitious; and the idea, which is half-shared with the memos about Our Mutual Friend and which seems derived from Dickens's imagination alone, of the lover pretending to be dead in order to effect his avenging purpose. Clearly Dickens had already used the latter notion behind the designated Leading Incident memo in the melodramatic story before the planning of Our Mutual Friend. Then, by the time of his thoughts about Our Mutual Friend, the notion had been abstracted from its role as a device subservient to the notion of love's revenge and become an organizing structure in itself, although, as shown, still a structure which remains firmly connected with the moral complexities of the circumstances from which it arises.

Our understanding of how Dickens conceived of a "story" may be extended by looking also at other outlines which appear quite as substantial as those discussed, but which lack the status of "leading incident" in the notebook. Directly following the "Rokesmith" idea we find:

A poor impostor of a man marries a woman for her money; she marries him for his money; after marriage

both find out their mistake, and enter into a league and covenant against folks in general.  
Done Lammles.  
 (19)

This, of course, is part of Our Mutual Friend--at the head of the next page "Our Mutual Friend" is the first entry and "The perfectly New people" is the last--the impostors and the New people come to be associated in the "Social Chorus" sections of the novel and to illustrate a common theme of Society's corruption, but clearly this Lammle outline is self-sufficient in the memoranda notebook, for its ironic point is completely explicit within this sketch. The actual scene in the novel which reveals the situation in dialogue between the couple is hardly more precise. And when we read that a passage in the third chapter of Edwin Drood, "The Nun's House," consisting of four hundred words of dialogue revealing in the midst of light conversation Rosa and Edwin's feelings about their predetermined engagement--in fact, setting out the gist of the memorandum of the couple and their "impending Fate"--was added by Dickens possibly as late as at the printers,<sup>20</sup> we realize that such passages of dialogue must have been an entirely natural way for him to organize his effects. Dickens brings to life in such dramatized passages, the force of the idea and its irony without resorting to the sort of expository prose by which

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<sup>20</sup>Or so Arthur J. Cox, ed. Edwin Drood (1870; Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books, 1974) dubiously tells us; the editor of the Clarendon edition (1972) simply notes that this passage (Penguin, pp. 56-57; Clarendon, pp. 18-19) is missing in the manuscript. The proofs for Nos. I-IV, which might show this addition, are also missing.

he first characterized it even to himself.

We have seen how minor characters taken from such various entries come together in a unified theme or meaning of the novel--the deceived and deceiving couple and the bran-new people; the supercilious man and the enthusiastically complimentary woman. On the level of a major character it can be instructive to note this coming-together of general meaning and individual behaviour pattern again. For instance, Arthur Clennam also develops recognizably through a consecutive series of entries:

English landscape. The beautiful prospect, trim fields, clipped hedges, everything so neat and orderly --gardens, houses, roads. Where are the people who do all this? There must be a great many of them, to do it. Where are they all? And are they, too, so well kept and so fair to see?

Suppose the foregoing to be wrought out by an Englishman--say, from China--who knows nothing about his native country.

A misplaced and mismarried man. Always, as it were, playing hide and seek with the world and never finding what Fortune seems to have hidden when he was born.  
(10)

These in combination would seem to form the essence of the beginning of the third chapter in Little Dorrit: the English landscape, by an extension of the speculation about the people who work, becomes the streets of working-class London on a Victorian Sunday:

Ten thousand responsible houses surrounded him, frowning as heavily on the streets they composed, as if they were every one inhabited by the ten young men of the Calendar's story, who blackened their faces and bemoaned their miseries every night. Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him where people lived so unwholesomely, that fair water put into

their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning; albeit my lord, their county member, was amazed that they failed to sleep in company with their butcher's meat. Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away towards every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river. What secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labour, six days in the week, lay among these Arcadian objects, from the sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave--what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day? Clearly they could want nothing but a stringent policeman.  
(LD, Bk.1, Chp.3, p.21)

To any reader aware of Dickens's opposition to Grosvenor's Sabbath Bill, which proposed closing all Sunday public entertainments, the tendencies of the above paragraph are familiar. The straightforward description of the outward appearance of London, as part of a fictional setting for the analysis of Arthur Clennam's state of mind, yields to an unexpected view of the battles and questions which permeate this cityscape. This could be seen as part of a general allusiveness, but the didactic intention is undoubtedly present from both the very opening of the chapter and the last line of the memorandum. As the three memoranda stand, they could just as easily have formed the impetus of an article on the subject of the peculiarly Household Words type which couched its facts and argument in narrative; indeed, it is only the novelistic and historical past tense which might have needed alteration.

Yet such a description provides a curiously apt preparation for the portrayal of Clennam which follows. The sociological phenomenon of the Victorian Sunday is



revealed as a relevant, even deeply felt, aspect of this character's biography and present unhappy burden of bitterness and despair; although the description of how he spent childhood Sundays might still have formed another passage in the potential article projected above, the crucial mention of his mother as she appeared on these occasions, which subsequently leads into the narrative of his visit with her, also leads back into the novel's plot. Perhaps Clennam's own characterization of himself and his upbringing to Mr. Meagles in the previous chapter --"Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance in this world and terror in the next--nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere"(LD, Bk.1, Chp.2, p.16)--has prepared the way for a more detailed development of this mood, and the reader is able to incorporate the scene's physical details into a general sense of Clennam's significance in the novel.

The question as to whether the third memorandum in the series ought strictly to be considered as part of Clennam's characterization points to our mixed sense of these elements: it is not, as are the other two, crossed out by vertical lines and the adjective "mismarried" would be inaccurate, and yet it surely evokes the sense we have of Clennam's character. To Mr. Meagles he has confessed that he is undecided about a future destination, being "such a waif and stray everywhere, that I am liable to be drifted where any current may set"(LD, Bk.1, Chp.2, p.15) and having no will, purpose, or hope of his own.

This type of the man "playing hide and seek with the world and never finding what Fortune seems to have hidden when he was born," in fact, echoes an earlier notebook

entry also uncrossed by vertical lines:

The man who is incapable of his own happiness.  
Or who is always in pursuit of happiness. Result,  
where is happiness to be found then. Surely not  
everywhere? Can that be so, after all? Is this  
my experience?

(7)

One wonders if the tendency to associate these entries is induced by the thought that they might be but two different statements of the same autobiographical experience. It is hard to refrain from recalling a letter to Forster in January 1855, where Dickens bewails:

Am altogether in a dishevelled state of mind--motes of new books in the dirty air, miseries of older growth threatening to close upon me. Why is it, that as with poor David, a sense comes always crushing on me now, when I fall into low spirits, as of one happiness I have missed in life, and one friend and companion I have never made?

(Forster, Bk.8, Chp.2, pp. 638-39)

Still, it is important to caution that use of the first person narrative voice in the notebook is not entirely unusual and is often assumed in order to illustrate the workings of minds obviously quite foreign or even repugnant to Dickens. Examples include many of the Society characters entries discussed earlier.

Nonetheless, there are a number of entries which do seem to have the force of the autobiographical in emotion. Another which particularly evokes the sense of identity or fate confounded occurs three entries further down from the Little Dorrit entries pertaining to that novel's progress and two pages after the Arthur Clennam series:

The idea of my being brought up by my mother--me the narrator--my father being dead; and growing up

in this belief until I find that my father is the gentleman I have seen, and oftener heard of, who has the handsome young wife, and the Dog I once took notice of when I was a little child, and who lives in the great house and drives about.  
(White's "Harriet's" poor boy)  
(12-13)

Forster tells us that this describes "an actual occurrence made known to him [Dickens] when he was at Bonchurch."

"White's" indicates that Dickens would have heard of this from the Reverend James White, the writer and clergyman, when Dickens and his family were staying in Bonchurch from the latter half of July to September 1849. Dickens had taken a seaside holiday at Bonchurch specifically at the suggestion of White, a friend and apparently talented raconteur; one, Forster wrote, whose

relish of his life had outlived its more than usual share of sorrows...Like his life, his genius was made up of alterations of mirth and melancholy. He would be immersed, at one time, in those darkest Scottish annals from which he drew his tragedies; and overflowing, at another, into Sir Frizzle Pumpkin's exuberant farce. The tragic histories may probably perish with the actor's perishable art.  
(Forster, Bk.6, Chp. 3, p.498)

Very likely it would be in the atmosphere created by such a man that Dickens was attracted to the anecdote of the boy discovering the truth about his station in life.

Dickens at this time had finished writing the fourth number of David Copperfield--which includes the chapters "I become Neglected and am Provided for," concerning his life with his stepfather after the death of his mother, and "I begin Life on my own Account, and don't like it," concerning his period in a London warehouse--by the middle of July, just before he travelled to Bonchurch. By the end of September

when he left Bonchurch, he had completed the fifth and sixth numbers. In the passages of the fourth number, as nowhere else perhaps, the experience of desolation and the sense of one's birthright having been lost are supreme:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth every-day associates with those of my happier childhood--not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written.<sup>21</sup>

The reader may recall quite easily all the well-known stories that evoke this same sensation: Joseph sold to the Egyptians by his brothers, Jacob's swindle of Esau (both occurring when the son is away from the father's protection), Tom Jones put out of his place by young Blifil, and as Betsey Trotwood says of the forlorn David who appears on her doorstep --"He's as like Cain before he was grown up, as he can be."<sup>22</sup> In Dickens's other works, we have the history of Oliver Twist, which ends with Oliver returning triumphantly with Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow to his native town, to hear that he is descended from a father of some property and of the same social circle as the people who have adopted him. During

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<sup>21</sup>Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1850), p. 112.

<sup>22</sup>Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 141.

this return it is characteristic of the new world created by this discovery that they drive past the workhouse and are welcomed instead into the town's "chief hotel (which Oliver used to stare up at, with awe, and think a mighty palace" (OT, 349).

There is also the history of Pip, of course, who, made sensitive to his uncertain status by dealings with both his sister-mother and the criminal Magwitch, feels his first real shame about these things after he has been admitted to Satis House:

Home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper. But, Joe had sanctified it, and I believed in it. I had believed in the best parlour as a most elegant saloon; I had believed in the front door, as a mysterious portal of the Temple of State whose solemn opening was attended with a sacrifice of roast fowls; I had believed in the kitchen as a chaste though not magnificent apartment; I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence. Within a single year, all this was changed. Now, it was all coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account.<sup>23</sup>

Leaving aside the fact that for the purposes of the novel, Satis House turns out to signify a false representation of Pip's status in life, the above passage might well have been the natural emotional outcome of the boy's discovery described in the memorandum. One thinks also of the young Pip's feelings when Estella, at the end of his first interview with Miss Havisham, takes him down to the open courtyard to feed him and then abruptly leaves him on his own to eat:

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<sup>23</sup>Dickens, "Great Expectations," All the Year Round  
4 (26 January 1861): 361.



She put the mug down on the stones of the yard,  
and gave me the bread and meat without looking  
at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in  
disgrace.<sup>24</sup>

Pip the child is stung to tears; Pip the adult writing  
afterwards, reflects that

My sister's bringing up had made me sensitive.  
In the little world in which children have their  
existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing  
so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice.  
It may be only small injustice that the child can be  
exposed to; but the child is small, and its world is  
small, and its rocking-horse stands as many hands high,  
according to scale, as a big-boned Irish hunter. Within  
myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual  
conflict with injustice.<sup>25</sup>

The word "injustice," the leitmotif of this paragraph, is also  
the unspoken implication of the treatment of the unacknowledged  
son in the memorandum. Although the notebook entry was  
apparently not directly incorporated in any of these novels,  
the mother who brings the young boy up in exclusion from his  
paternal home stands in the same relation as his sister-mother  
does to Pip, embodying all the instances in his life when he  
has been shut out in the courtyard.

Forster tells us that Satis House was based physically  
on an old house in Rochester, called Restoration House. But  
it is Gadshill which, also according to Forster's description,  
may be said to have something of the same sort of emotional  
significance as the house in the memorandum. Even before he  
bought it, Dickens had related to Forster and others,

That amid the recollections connected with his childhood  
it held always a prominent place, for, upon first seeing

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<sup>24</sup>Dickens, "Great Expectations," All the Year Round  
4 (29 December 1860): 268.

<sup>25</sup>Dickens, "Great Expectations," All the Year Round  
4 (29 December 1860): 268.

it as he came from Chatham with his father, and looking up at it with much admiration, he had been promised that he might himself live in it or some such house when he came to be a man, if he would only work hard enough. Which for a long time was his ambition.

(Forster, Bk.1, Chp.1, pp.2-3)

In his writing, this story is to be found in the piece, "The German Chariot" (All the Year Round, 7 April 1860), where Dickens dramatizes his younger self as a "very queer small boy" who tells it to the famous adult author. In fact, it was towards the end of 1855, when Dickens made this prophecy good and began the process of buying Gadshill for himself, finally completed in March 1856 and all taking place during the writing of Little Dorrit. The purchase of Gadshill and the planning of Little Dorrit set out in these entries would all go forward at the same period; this entry of the boy discovering his relationship to a house and father, following closely as it does upon the Little Dorrit entries, may therefore perhaps have been revived at the time of the Gadshill project, when Dickens himself was experiencing the verification of his father's prediction. The last number of Little Dorrit was finished on 9 May 1857, with the last visit to the Marshalsea site reported in the preface occurring on 6 May 1857. The Little Dorrit entries immediately preceding "White's 'Harriet's' poor boy" (12-13) point to a clear notion of the novel's climax and resolution, suggesting that any entries coming after them were probably written early in 1857.

Moreover, we have seen how Dickens, in January 1855, a few years after the time at Bonchurch and in the very month when the practice of keeping this notebook began, identified

his own sense of unhappiness with that of David Copperfield's:

the so happy and yet so unhappy existence which seeks its realities in unrealities, and finds its dangerous comfort in a perpetual escape from the disappointment of heart around it.

(Forster, Bk.8, Chp.2, p. 638)

And another letter, in June 1862, reiterates this same sense of the unhappy child being the father of the dissatisfied man:

I must entreat you...to pause for an instant, and go back to what you know of my childish days, and to ask yourself whether it is natural that something of the character formed in me then, and lost under happier circumstances, should have reappeared in the last five years. The never to be forgotten misery of that old time, bred a certain shrinking sensitiveness in a certain ill-clad ill-fed child, that I have found come back in the never to be forgotten misery of this later time.

(Forster, Bk.1, Chp.3, p. 39)

All this suggests a context for the writing-down in 1857 of an idea which Dickens had first heard approximately eight to ten years earlier. The man searching futilely for happiness somehow becomes associated with the boy whose birthright was ignored. These details may suggest to the reader why this entry, never used, sets off echoes of other tales in which Dickens's power to evoke emotion can be seen at its most impressive and involving.

There is an inherent difference between the sort of narrative "idea" embodied in this entry and that found in something like the satire of the fashionable house and social manners. Here, there is no satiric or didactic point, but rather, an emotion to be worked through from the original irony which inspires it. This basic feeling can then find its "objective correlative" in a number of

narrative structures, such as those typified by David Copperfield, Great Expectations, and Smike's story in Nicholas Nickleby. For Dickens, it seems as if this emotion was particularly fertile in the number and intensity of structures which it produced. Quite apart from its philosophical value in this stark form, for him it seemed to incorporate a great deal of fictional value; and surely this is the narrative fundamental which we seek to apprehend, and contemplate, in discussion of every author: the supremely fictional ingredient of his impulse to write, whether it be plot structure or emotion or image.

In the instance cited it would seem to be the image of a great house which inspires in the adult writer a sense of irony regarding the disposition of life's circumstances, and which is embodied most characteristically in the Wordsworthian narrative of the child's view of the world yielding to the adult's and the adult comparing his "reality" with the child's expectations. Deceptively, the forward chronological progression of such narratives is only present in order to highlight the features of an original status quo and to concentrate the reader's emotions on its interest. If we should wonder as to the peculiarities of this first state, they should perhaps consist, not so much in an absolute state of Edenic happiness as in the absolute predominance of dreaming and fancy in the child's life, a type of life which we know from many of his writings and statements that Dickens valued highly and spent much time proselytizing. If Dickens can be

to have had any favourite "philosophic" idea, it is that of the imagination as a force which confers "meaning" on individual events and lives.

The autobiographical clue to be sensed also in an entry immediately following the "Clennam" series leads us--admittedly via an oblique route--to discern another type of narrative cluster which seems central to Dickens's fiction. Some critics have guessed Georgina Hogarth to be the prototype of:

She sacrificed to children and sufficiently rewarded. From a child herself, always "the Children" (of somebody else) to engross her. And so it comes to pass that she never has a child herself--is never married--is always devoted "to the children" (of somebody else), and they love her--and she has always youth dependent on her 'till her death--and dies quite happily.  
(10)

The entry is not crossed out, but apart from its personal interest, it is representative among the memoranda generally of the strain of idealism or wish fulfilment notoriously invested by Dickens in his women characters throughout his career.

In this vein we note also:

The girl separating herself from the lover who has shewn himself unworthy--loving him still--living single for his sake--but nevermore renewing their old relations. Coming to him when they are both grown old and nursing him in his last illness.  
(6)

This was also apparently never used, though one may have felt similar emotions aroused by the stories of Amy Dorrit and Clennam or Lizzie Hexam and Eugene.

In fact, there is an analogous memorandum among a series relating to Little Dorrit, which reads:



Arthur Clennam falling into difficulty and himself imprisoned in the Marshalsea. Then Little Dorrit, out of all her wealth and changed station, comes back in her old dress, and devotes herself in the old way.  
(12)

This, unlike the preceding entries, obviously occurs well on in the progress of the novel, and can be found little changed in the plan for the eighteenth number. Not only the idealistic view of woman's capacity for devotion, but also the satisfying continuity and symmetry of a relationship's history, are elemental to this entry. Given that it is set among entries such as that for Mrs. General ("the woman for whom the world is to be of barley sugar") which were required as early as halfway through the book, the notion of their separation and reunion must have been implicit early on, as part of his view of Clennam and Little Dorrit--though "Little" was not an automatic part of her name until after the first number had been set in proof. And immediately before this, is an entry which formed another such climax of Little Dorrit:

First sign of Little Dorrit's father failing and breaking down. Cancels long interval. Begins to talk about the Turnkey who first called him the Father of the Marshalsea--as if he were still living--"Tell Bob I want to speak to him. See if he is on the Lock, my dear."  
(12)

Thus, in both these entries the intervention of time gives such actions their piquancy and pathos; the cancellation of time forms the conceit and resolution of the narrative.

Again, there is a similar entry, twelve pages later, pertaining to the direction of Our Mutual Friend, which also pinpoints the moment when a catastrophe reverses the status

of a prominent male figure with respect to the helpmeet he loves, and puts him in her dependence:

As to the question whether I, Eugene, lying ill and sick even unto death, may be consoled by the representation that coming through this illness, I shall begin a new life, and have energy and purpose and all that I have yet wanted:

"I hope I should, but I know I shouldn't. Let me die, my dear."

(24)

Despite the strong impression here and in the text of the novel itself, that Eugene will die, he lives to scandalize the Social Chorus with his declass  marriage; it is almost as if Dickens had conceived two endings for Our Mutual Friend as he did for Great Expectations.

One might be surprised that such integral parts of these novels' plots should be found here in an even more detailed form than in their respective number plans: surely, by this stage in a novel, one would have expected to find all such relevant details in the working plans rather than in a book intended for irregular use. However, these are not just expedient plot resolutions but structures descriptive of moral situations or ideas. Their occurrence in the memo book suggests Dickens's fundamental preoccupation with the recurring scenario of a spiritual breakthrough being produced by a physical breakdown. And, in fact, one only needs to run over the novels not represented here to be confirmed in this: from Martin Chuzzlewit's languishing in Eden, through Dombey, Richard Carstone, and Pip. Although it looks strongly as if Eugene's death might break the pattern, Dickens finally reiterates it in his last completed novel.

In this respect, perhaps, the memoranda notebook can be seen to have relevance to a greater part of Dickens's career than merely the decade during which he referred to it, because its ideas evoke narratives from all parts of his career, showing what is common to many of them.

The final outlook to be taken on these memoranda may possibly be summarized most truthfully by Henry James, an author who found the practice essential to his writing, and yet who well understood its ambiguous relation to his art:

One's notes, as all writers remember, sometimes explicitly mention, sometimes indirectly reveal, and sometimes wholly dissimulate, such clues and such obligations....Most of all, of a certainty, is brought back, before these promiscuties, the old burden of the much life and the little art, and of the portentous dose of the one it takes to make any show of the other....Doesn't the fabulist himself indeed recall even as one of his best joys the particular pang...of parting with some conceit of which he can give no account but that his sense --of beauty or truth or whatever--has been for ever so long saturated with it?<sup>26</sup>

Such notebooks should not lead the reader to fasten on any critical keys or psychoanalytic analyses of Dickens as a man who wrote obsessively about wronged little boys or deathbed reformations. Dickens was no philosopher, nor was he proficient at dialectical exposition; rather, he seems to have been naturally inclined towards what has been termed "mythic thinking...a thinking in poetic narrative or vision."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>F.O. Matthiesson and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. xi.

<sup>27</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, 3rd ed. (1949; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), p. 193.

No single statement of meaning could ever be comprehensive enough for him, and it is indicative of his sense of the complexity of the life he observed, that he felt compelled to write so many novels. One has only to review the very number of entries that his notebook contains, to be impressed once again by the "thousand and one" tales that he could tell.

## CONCLUSION

The crucial feature about Dickens's story-telling which the memorandum notebook cannot register is the stylistic abundance which was special to him, and which makes the development of any of the notes for stories finally unpredictable. In a sense the notebook only shows him casting about for occasions which will allow him to create the imaginative worlds brought into existence by his style. The stories seem mere formalities and, in fact, the regularizing of such architecture must finally be accepted as a sign of anxiety about the conduct of his "invention."

The evidence of difficulties during the composition of Our Mutual Friend, where he underwrote the sixteenth number --"a thing I have not done since Pickwick!" (to Forster, July 1865; Forster, Bk.9, Chp.5, p.743)--and Edwin Drood, where the first two numbers were "twelve printed pages too short!!!" (to Forster, 22 December 1869; Forster, Bk.11, Chp.2, pp. 809-10)-- obviously bears out the fears with which the notebook was begun. We know that Dickens tried, vainly, to begin Our Mutual Friend's serial run with no fewer than five numbers in hand (Forster,



Bk.9, Chp.5, p.741), and it is commonly thought that with the writing of Edwin Drood there may have been an unsuccessful attempt to plan out an entire novel in advance.

And, yet, the style and richness of individual passages continues right up until the end: even in the same letter to Wilkie Collins, in which he speaks of feeling "quite dazed in getting back to the large canvas and the big brushes," upon beginning the work on Our Mutual Friend, Dickens also mentions that it has required "a perfect throwing away of points that might be amplified"(NL,III,378-79; 27 January 1864).

In the case of Edwin Drood, whether we accept Forster's view that the Sapsea fragment was a means of delaying the catastrophe with a fresh vein of interest(Forster, Bk.11, Chp.2, p.810), or the Clarendon editor's view that it was an early draft for the eighteenth chapter,<sup>28</sup> a look at the prose itself shows that Dickens could throw away points undreamt of by his readers. In fact, the whole passage (which Forster entitled "HOW MR. SAPSEA CEASED TO BE A MEMBER OF THE EIGHT CLUB," Bk.11, Chp.2, p. 811), has a liveliness and irrelevance not unlike the first chapter of Pickwick--a chapter which is itself virtually nothing more than an undiscarded try-out for that novel. Here again, we may recall the suggestive hypothesis, mentioned earlier, that the important passage of dialogue between Rosa Bud and Edwin Drood found in the

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<sup>28</sup>Margaret Cardwell, ed., Edwin Drood (1870; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. xlviii. The Sapsea fragment is reprinted in Appendix C, pp. 232-35.

third chapter was improvised only at the last moment. Both this and the Sapsea fragment, though remaining enigmatic, illustrate Dickens's ability seemingly to formulate his characters and narrative goals through the very medium of his own style. Whether that be "in the Pickwickian sense" or in the Megalosauran manner of Bleak House, the strength of his style is integral to his meaning.

On this subject, the French writer Albert Camus has shown that style in general represents the essential means by which art conducts its construction of the relationship between meaning and human life: "Through style, the creative effort reconstructs the world...great style is not a mere formal virtue."<sup>29</sup> Dickens's style expresses his rebellious dissatisfaction with the world--for even the Pickwickian irrelevance protests the meaninglessness of society's speech--and his positive will to recast it in the shapes of fellowship and compassion, be they even in as elementary a form as Sam Weller's speeches. As we have seen with Little Dorrit, his novels, in particular, are expressive, in the very same moments, of the senses of contingency or chaos in human life and of its consolations. The stylized memory of David Copperfield the man inherently resolves the puzzling discrepancies imprinted on the sensibility of the boy. The pathetic story of Little Nell, realized according to the categories of a Master Humphrey-like mind, finds Christian

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<sup>29</sup>Albert Camus, The Rebel, trans. Anthony Bower (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. 239.

consolation in sufferings which, for the child herself, lead only to isolation and fatalism.

The novels, in their very length and abundance of description, mimic reality's infinite enumeration, and yet, by their style, circumscribe it with the reassurance of a narrative setting and a meaningful progression. In Dickens's style, the chaotic profusion of street life is thus celebrated and yet reshaped. In such a narrative sensibility a place can be found for everything, for Dickens's novelistic style comprises a kind of infinite divisibility of narrative. Even a miscellany of articles sustained over twenty years could not cumulatively achieve the satisfying recreation of the world that he effected time and again with each novel. The literary tense of passé défini imbues the present with a sense of destiny and coherence. The meaning of a literary idea, in Dickens's narrative, is that babel and meaninglessness shall be subverted in the very instant in which they seem to overwhelm.

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